



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

We, *The Compassionate Friends*, are sorry to learn about the death of your child and extend our sympathy to you.

The Compassionate Friends is an organization that offers friendship and understanding to bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. The purpose of this group is to promote a positive resolution of grief by our willingness to listen and share through our chapter programs. The group also provides someone to talk to who understands. All of the people involved are parents, grandparents, or siblings who have experienced the death of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

Our chapter meets every second Tuesday of the month at 7pm at Arborlawn Methodist Church in Fort Worth. We usually end the meeting between 8:30 and 8:45. Some feel hesitant about attending for the first time. However, most find mutual support and continue to come. The meetings provide a platform for coping with our grief.

Each month you will receive a newsletter to keep you informed and to provide helpful healing information. We also maintain a Lending Library at each meeting filled with resources available for you to borrow.

We send our warmest wishes for peace and love.

Sincerely,



The Compassionate Friends
Fort Worth Chapter

Chapter Leaders and Steering Committee



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“New Member Packet”

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When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

ORGANIZATION

- In the 35 years following its incorporation, TCF/USA has grown from 40 Chapters to more than 650, with locations in all 50 states plus Washington D.C., Guam, and Puerto Rico. All Chapter leaders are volunteers and are bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, as are the 55 regional coordinators who serve as liaisons between Chapters and the national organization.
- The Compassionate Friends has a 13-member national volunteer board of directors consisting of bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents.
- The Compassionate Friends National Office is located in Oak Brook, Illinois. The Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer work in partnership, and are supported by four full time and two part time staff members.

ROLE OF LOCAL CHAPTERS

- Regular meetings of local Chapters provide a caring environment in which bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents can work through their grief with the help of others who have “been there.” Monthly, more than 16,000 people attend Chapter meetings.
- Outreach is provided to more than 100,000 bereaved family members and professionals each month through Chapter newsletters, websites, Facebook Pages, special programs including regional conferences, walks to remember, phone calls, letters, e-mails, and personal visits.
- Educational information on grief following the death of a child and the work of TCF is provided to the community through publicity, speaking engagements, and the distribution of materials.

EXAMPLES OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

- *We Need Not Walk Alone*, TCF’s national magazine is published three times a year for bereaved families, as well as professionals and Chapter leadership, addressing grief issues from a variety of sources and viewpoints. The magazine is available in printed form and is now offered free to online subscribers.
- TCF’s national website (www.compassionatefriends.org), where information and resources can be viewed, also provides Spanish language support. In 2013, the website was visited almost 1/2 million times with the largest day more than 18,000 on the day of the Worldwide Candle Lighting. TCF’s national website was named first by GoodTherapy.org in its Top Ten for 2012 listing of grief and loss websites on the Internet.
- A free monthly e-newsletter is sent to more than 16,000 people.
- TCF’s National Facebook Page communicates every day with its more than 75,000 members and continues to grow daily. A Spanish language Facebook Page has been added, and TCF has a Twitter and LinkedIn presence.

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a national nonprofit, self-help support organization, offering friendship, understanding, and hope to families grieving the death of a child of any age, from any cause. There is no religious affiliation and no individual membership fees or dues are charged. All bereaved family members are welcome. Founded in England in 1969, TCF was established in the United States in 1972, with 501(c)(3) not-for-profit incorporation in 1978, under which provision the organization’s more than 650 local Chapters also operate. TCF operates as separate entities in at least 30 countries around the world.

- In 2013, the National Office communicated with more than 670,000 bereaved parents, siblings, grandparents, other family members, friends, professionals, and Chapters.
- TCF operates an Online Support Community chat program on its national website with rooms open every day to its members. Rooms are available covering many topics related to the death of a child.
- Assistance is provided to existing Chapters, as well as those persons seeking to form a new Chapter.
- Chapter Leadership Training Programs are conducted each year at locations throughout the country, including TCF's National Conference.

In the United States, it is expected that over 100,000 infants, children, teenagers, and young adults will die this year. In addition, more than 25,000 families can be expected to face a stillbirth and nearly 600,000 an early pregnancy loss. A child's death at any age, from any cause, is a shattering experience for a family. When a child dies, a family can turn to The Compassionate Friends self-help bereavement organization for the emotional support needed during the long grief journey that lies ahead.

- The National Office coordinates national public awareness, as well as national fundraising.
- Among activities sponsored annually by the national organization are the National Conference, the Worldwide Candle Lighting®, and the Walk to Remember®.
- TCF National has created and publishes 38 bereavement brochures (in English and Spanish) on most aspects of grief following the death of a child.

FUNDING

- Local Chapters pay an annual membership fee to the national organization. All contributions from individual members are voluntary. There are no individual dues or fees of any kind.
- TCF's 2014 budget is over \$1 million, with 85 percent allocated for services to Chapters and the public. Administrative and fundraising costs comprise 15 percent of the organization's total operating budget.
- TCF income is derived from individual member donations, Chapter fees and donations, sale of resource materials, National Conference and Walk to Remember proceeds, and the business and philanthropic communities. TCF has been awarded The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence for being able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that it meets the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness. Only 2,000 of the 1 million charities operating in the United States today have been awarded this Seal. All contributions to The Compassionate Friends are tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated.
- TCF Foundation, Inc. has been established to assist in the long-term economic stability of The Compassionate Friends, Inc. It accepts major gifts of \$5,000 or more and the larger the endowment fund's balance, the larger the distribution each year to The Compassionate Friends, Inc. All contributions to The Compassionate Friends Foundation are tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated.

For further information, contact The Compassionate Friends, Inc.

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WHY BUTTERFLIES

Since the early centuries of the Christian Church, the butterfly has symbolized the resurrection and life after death. The caterpillar signifies life here on earth, the cocoon, death; and the butterfly, the emergence of the dead into a new, beautiful and freer existence. Frequently, the butterfly is seen with the work "Nika," which means victory. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross movingly tells of seeing butterflies drawn all over the walls of the children's dormitories in the World War II concentration camps. Since Elisabeth believes in the innate intuitiveness of children, she concludes that these children knew their fate and were leaving us a message. The Compassionate Friends had adopted the butterfly as one of its symbols—a sign of hope to us that our children are living in another dimension with greater beauty and freedom—a comforting thought to many.

THE SECRET OF TCF

The secret of The Compassionate Friends' success is simple: There is no line between being a helper and being helped. In the early months of peoples' membership in TCF, it seems that most of the time is spent absorbing ideas, crying and letting the grief flow, and "learning the ropes" of being a bereaved parent. The next step is reaching out to others and helping them. It is not a big step, for listening to another person sort out his life helps us to sort out our lives, too. But it is an important step because it is the first point at which the movement is reversed. All the energy had been going inward. We had been feeling so empty inside that we kept withdrawing into ourselves. But at that point when we turn around is the point when we first listen to another, speak the words of comfort and hope, share out pain instead of just feeling our pain. At that time the real healing has started.

Dennis Klass, PhD. Advisor—TCF, St. Louis, MO.

The Compassionate Friends Credo

Fort Worth Chapter



We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.

We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.

Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.

We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.

We are young, and we are old.

Some of us are far along in our grief, but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.

Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.

But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.

We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We Need Not Walk Alone.

We Are The Compassionate Friends.

ANGER IN GRIEF

WHAT IS ANGER?

Technically, anger is “a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism” or “emotional excitement induced by intense displeasure.” Synonyms are ire, rage, fury, indignation, and wrath. Ire may suggest “greater intensity, often with an evident display of feeling.” Rage suggests “loss of self-control from violence of emotion.” Fury is “overmastering destructive rage merging on madness.” Indignation stresses “righteous anger at what one considers unfair, mean or shameful.” Wrath is likely to suggest “a desire or intent to revenge or punish.”

WHY DO WE FEEL GUILTY WHEN WE'RE ANGRY?

Anger in general is regarded as unacceptable by society, by our religions, and by our inner selves. Society says don't be angry; society says being angry is equated with not liking a person; society says anger is disrespectful. We're very sensitive to society's rules, especially the unwritten codes of conduct. If we don't like someone, we are indifferent to them and don't waste our energy on anger. We are taught as children to be polite and to get along with everyone. When children are angry, they tend to fight, shout or sulk. We admonish them for fighting, shouting, and sulking and inadvertently are teaching them to repress anger and frustration.

As we mature, we try to repress those feelings even more. If we suffer the loss of a child — the worst tragedy of life — we are emotionally unprepared to express our anger at this gross indignity. Family and friends can accept our tears, depression and even guilt. If we express our anger and rage, they are embarrassed by the display of that kind of emotion. They look away, and we sense their disapproval. Our grief-stricken minds are filled with guilt. If our family and long-time friends and associates disapprove of our expression of anger, then we must be wrong to show it.

Many of us have problems dealing with anger honestly because of our religious upbringing. Some religions say anger is a sin. We are supposed to accept and forgive, but it's very difficult to do when a part of our life has been ripped away. When anger has gone unheard, the struggle is greater to forgive. Religion also teaches us that only

justifiable anger is okay, and we aren't the ones who are supposed to judge. However, there are many injustices today as we all know. We are justified in our anger.

WHY DOES ANGER APPEAR IN GRIEF?

Anger appears in grief for many reasons* Sometimes it appears because of regrets. "If only I had done this or that, then my child wouldn't have died." Usually anger surfaces because of the injustice of death. Death takes the good and the young and those who most want to live. It leaves the bad and the criminal and those who have died inside already. We see this injustice, but death ignores it. We ask "why?" and receive no answer.

The powerlessness we feel in the face of death is a big factor in anger. We're helpless. In most areas of our life, we're usually in control. With death, there's nothing we can do. It makes us angry to be so helpless and incapable. As parents we give life to our child; we nurture, love, teach, watch and hope for him or her. When death takes the child, we feel very justifiable anger.

WHO ARE THE RECIPIENTS OF OUR ANGER?

If anger isn't acceptable when we are children, then it is less acceptable when we are grown. The disapproval of those close to us causes us to subconsciously think, "But no one said I couldn't get angry at myself, and no one will ever know. Sometimes we hide it so successfully, we no longer recognize it in ourselves. This anger is depression. If anger is acceptable to us, we may still be angry at ourselves but in a conscious direct way which takes the form of guilt.

Others who may be the object of our anger are: spouses, surviving siblings, other family members, friends, ministers, coworkers, etc. We may feel that they didn't care enough or that they didn't do enough to save the child. We may be angry that one child was taken and another spared; then we feel guilty for feeling that. We may unconsciously blame our spouses. Usually they cared enough and/or did enough, but the anger still needs to be expressed. If they are professionals, they should understand. If they are personal relationships and good ones, they will endure — realizing that the anger is not a

personal attack. If the relationship was not a good one, they will back off from the expression of anger, taking it as a personal affront.

We may not want to admit it, but we are angry at the child who died. We feel we can never admit it because of what people may think. We know that we are sad and lonely and empty and lost — but never angry at our child! This feeling is normal, however. We feel that if the child had been more careful, more responsible, had taken better care of himself, had tried harder to live, then he wouldn't have died. We ask, "Why did you leave me?"

Many of us are enraged with God. Why did He let this happen? Why did He give me this child, only to snatch him away? How could He let my child suffer so much? Why couldn't He have taken me instead? We feel that God could have prevented the death. These feelings of anger toward God cause tremendous guilt and confusion; we were taught to accept anything God sends.

HOW CAN WE EXPRESS OUR ANGER IN A HEALTHY MANNER?

The most important step is to admit that you feel angry. Logically, how could any of us lose our child and not feel angry? The second step is to admit that you need to express your anger. Don't turn it inward or refuse to discuss it. Those close to you will allow you to show anger. If you think they won't, try it anyway. You may be surprised — they may have been waiting for you to show anger, and they may want to express their anger with you. If they won't accept your anger, don't give up! Scream it aloud when you're alone, or talk to a professional. Ministers, psychiatrists, psychologists and others are trained to deal with anger and can help you handle yours.

SOME WAYS TO VENT ANGER

- Screaming in a private place, into the wind, or in the woods,
- Kicking a can down the street or in the basement
- Beating the floor with a towel or pillow
- Smashing bricks with a bat or hammer
- Throwing books or shoes, ripping magazines or newspaper
- Splitting wood or pounding nails
- Target or skeet shooting
- Buying old dishes at garage sales and then

smashing them

- Tiring housework like window washing, wax stripping, garage cleaning
- Jogging, swimming, running, aerobics
- Just plain crying
- Sometimes distractions like novels or movies help dissipate rage. If concentration is a problem, read short stories or articles or watch TV.

You may notice that most of these activities are physical. You may feel drained afterwards, but you will feel better.

PLEASE DON'T:

- Sedate your anger with tranquilizers
- Drink your anger into (temporary) oblivion
- Retreat into silence
- Hide from the world
- Drive recklessly — you may endanger someone else's life
- Take your anger out on spouse or surviving children.
- This doesn't mean that you shouldn't discuss your anger with them — you should. Just don't scream at them all the time without explaining why.
- Try to ignore your grief and anger. It won't go away! It will come out in other ways — usually in the form of medical problems.
- Avoid talking about your dead child. It will help you express your feelings to talk about his or her life. It will be painful but not as painful as not talking about it.

If you ever feel completely overwhelmed by your anger and feel you are being consumed by it and never will escape it, don't panic! If you don't want to talk to family or a professional, call someone on the Telephone Friends list. They have all been through the same feelings of rage and anger and know how you feel. They can reassure you that you're normal, you're not cracking up, and — most importantly — you will get through it!



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- Grief, with its many ups and downs, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. Be patient with yourself. Each person's grief is individual
 - Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built-up tension for everyone. Cry freely as you feel the need.
 - Physical reactions to death may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. You may find that you have very little energy and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest and moderate exercise are especially important at this time.
 - Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medications should be taken sparingly and only under the supervision of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the necessary grieving process.
 - Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive to you. Talk about your loss so they know this is appropriate.
 - Whenever possible, put off major decisions (changing residence, changing jobs, etc.) for at least a year.
 - Avoid making hasty decisions about your loved one's belongings. Do not allow others to take over or to rush you. You can do it little by little whenever you feel ready.
 - You may feel that you have nothing to live for may think about a release from this intense pain. Be assured that many feel this way but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The pain does lessen.
 - Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of “if only”. In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings, and learn to forgive yourself.
 - Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner.
 - Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are; so share thoughts and tears with them. Though it is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included.
 - Holidays and the anniversaries of your loved ones birth and death can be stressful times. Consider the feelings of the entire family when planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs.
 - Death often causes one to challenge and examine his/her faith or philosophy of life. Don't be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable.
 - It helps to become involved with a group of others having similar experiences; sharing eases loneliness and promotes the expression of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding.

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a national mutual assistance self-help organization offering support to families who have experienced the death of a child through nearly 600 local community chapters. For further information contact the national office.

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The First Time

-By Sara T. DeLeon

"It's a support group for parents who have lost a child. You don't have to say a thing." My sister tried to reassure me. I didn't have the energy to make up an excuse, so I let her lead me to the car.

As we drove, I felt sick to my stomach. My mind raced through all the scenarios I expected to find. I dreaded seeing a room full of people who resembled the hollow shell I saw in the mirror.

Walking from the car to the brightly lit room, I held the arms of my husband and sister and tried to breathe.

I had a new mantra: "I don't have to say a word."

Entering the room I felt my tears, always so close to the surface, spilling over. I didn't make a sound as they ran down my cheeks, and through the watery cloud, I saw figures approach and reach out. With a series of deep hugs and quiet whispers, I was guided to a chair.

"We're sorry for the reason you're here, but we're glad you've found us."

Someone handed me a bottle of water and a bundle of tissue. As I sat in my chair and waited for the meeting to begin, I peeked up to notice the room filling. One woman across from me caught my eye and I quickly looked down.

Please don't look at me, I thought, no one look at me.

The meeting began and I allowed myself to glance at the parents that were there. Some smiled at others openly. How could this be? How could they smile? A wooden butterfly was being passed around and parents were introducing themselves, telling whom they had lost and how. It was all too much. *I didn't belong here. I am NOT one of them! I have NOT lost my son!*

The sobs exploded, uncontrollably from deep within, and I quickly covered my face with my hands. How can I tell them? I'm so ashamed. They'll think I was a horrible mother.

You don't have to say a word, I reminded myself.

I regained my composure. *I'll just pass the butterfly. Three more . . . Two more . . . It's almost time. I don't feel well. . . Now, I held the butterfly and, as I turned it over and over in my hand, I heard myself speak...*

"My name is Sara. My son, Shawn, was just 15 years old when he took his life. It's been 11 days." I gasped for a deep breath and passed the butterfly.

The group split up into smaller groups in order to more intimately share personal stories about the children we had lost.

I'll just sit and listen, I thought. That will be okay.

One by one, parents told their truths about the precious children that had once been. They had walked where I walk today. I listened closely. And then ... I didn't want to remain quiet anymore. I began to tell my story. It flowed out in bursts like the tears from my eyes. I purged the hurt and guilt, and shared the love I felt for my baby boy. I allowed the agony of my soul to be visible to these strangers and, as I finished, I saw the love in their eyes as they nodded their heads in understanding.

On the drive home, my sister asked, "So, what do you think?"

"I'll go again," I whispered.

And, I have. ☺

Sara DeLeon lives in Tucson, Arizona, with her husband, Marco, and daughter, Marina. Sara has been a public school teacher for 8 years and currently teaches seventh-grade social studies. Sara's son, Shawn, took his life on February 14, 2004. "I was fortunate to find TCF so soon. I have used writing as a therapy and I hope sharing it with others will be of some help." E-mail: deleondeals@comcast.net



25 TIPS FOR CREATIVE COPING

1. Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize.
2. Acknowledge your thoughts. Accept both the positive and negative.
3. Make a conscious attempt to regain a sense of humor, zest for living.
4. Figure out exactly what you want to do...do it!
5. Become as informed/knowledgeable as possible. Knowledge is power.
6. Assert yourself. Ask for what you need.
7. Believe in yourself.
8. Listen to yourself.
9. Engage in whatever exercise and activity is possible. Get moving!
10. Set small goals first. Accomplish them. Set bigger goals.
11. Set specific date with yourself to do something you like. It helps you out of depression.
12. Reach out to others.
13. Focus on only one worry at a time.
14. Search for joy every day. Insist on it!
15. Try to retain a sense of perspective.
16. Pick your worries. Don't worry about worrying.
17. Remember that life requires effort on your part. Work at lifting depression.
18. One day at a time...know some days all you can manage...is one minute at a time.
19. Don't wait for happiness...Make it happen now. This is it.
20. Realize that love isn't enough, but nothing works without it.
21. Don't forget how to dream. Practice it often.
22. Be kind to yourself. Learn to forgive yourself.
23. Laugh (*at least once a day*).
24. Listen to everyone, but follow your own music.
25. Hug someone often. ***Hug yourself.***

PLEASE

Please - don't ask me if I'm over it yet. I'll never be "*over it*."

Please - don't tell me he or she is in a better place. They aren't here.

Please - don't say "*at least he or she isn't suffering*;" I haven't come to terms with why he or she had to suffer at all.

Please - don't tell me you know how I feel, unless you have lost a child.

Please - don't tell me to get on with my life. I'm still here, you'll notice.

Please - don't ask me if I feel better. Bereavement isn't a condition that "*clears up*".

Please - don't tell me "*God never makes a mistake*;" you mean He did this on purpose?

Please - don't tell me "*at least you had him or her for 'so many' years*;" what year would you choose for your son or daughter to die?

Please - don't tell me God never gives you more than you can bear; who decides how much another person can bear?

Please – *just say you are sorry.*

Please – *just say you remember him or her if you do.*

Please – *just let me talk if I want to.*

Please – *just let me cry when I must.*

PLEASE

Hope for the Bereaved

SUGGESTIONS FOR HELPING YOURSELF THROUGH GRIEF

This title is not meant to indicate that others in our lives do not help us through grief. We do need the help of relatives and friends, and may need the help of professional counselling. At the same time, it is important for us to make the effort to help ourselves. Remember that grief takes a lot of energy. Treat yourself with the same care and attention that you would offer to a good friend in the same situation. Most of us are aware of “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR” – we forget the part – “AS YOU LOVE YOURSELF”. Not all suggestions will be helpful to everyone. Grief has its unique sides. Choose the ideas that appeal to you.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF

- Go gently. Don't rush too much. Your body, mind and heart need energy to mend.
- Don't take on new responsibilities right away. Don't overextend yourself. Keep decision making to a minimum.
- Don't compare yourself to other bereaved. It may seem that you aren't adjusting as well as they; in reality you don't know what's behind their public façade.
- Throw away notions of a fixed period of mourning: One year and then you're “over it.” This is fiction. Grief takes time, whatever time it takes.

ASK FOR AND ACCEPT HELP

- Don't be afraid to ask for help from those close to you when you need it. So much hurt and pain go unheeded during grief because we don't want to bother anyone else with our problems. Wouldn't you want someone close to you to ask for help if they needed it? Our family and friends can't read our minds. Some relatives and friends will not be able to handle your grief. It is very important to find someone who cares, and understands with whom you may talk freely. Seek out an understanding friend, another bereaved person or a support group member.

- Accept help and support when offered. It is okay to need comforting. Often people wait to be told when you're ready to talk or if you need anything. Tell them.
- Pray to the person who has died.
- If you are troubled and need help, contact your local twenty-four hour hotline.
- Join a self-help group. They offer support, understanding, friendship and HOPE.
- Give yourself some time to sort out your thoughts but don't build a wall around yourself in fear of being hurt again. It is important to love and enjoy the people in your life instead of distancing yourself from them.
- If grief is intense and prolonged, it may harm your physical and mental well-being. If it is necessary, seek out a competent counselor. Check to see if your health insurance covers the charges. It is important to take care of yourself.

ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS

- Feel what you feel. You don't choose your emotions; they choose you.
- It's okay to cry. Crying makes you feel better.
- It's okay to be angry. You may be angry with yourself, God, the person who died, others, or just angry in general. Don't push it down. Let it out (hit on a pillow or punching bag, scream, swim, chop wood, exercise, etc.).
- Thinking you are going crazy is a very normal reaction. Most grieving people experience this. You are not losing your mind, only reacting to the death.
- Depression is common to those in grief. Be careful not to totally withdraw yourself from others. If your depression becomes severe or you're considering suicide, get professional help immediately.
- The emotions of a survivor are often raw. It is important to let these feelings out. If you don't, they will come out some other time, some other

way. That is certain. You won't suffer nearly as much from "getting too upset" as you will from being brave and keeping your honest emotions all locked inside. Share your "falling to pieces" with supportive loved ones, as often as you feel the need.

- You may have psychosomatic complaints, physical problems brought on by an emotional reaction. The physical problems are real; take steps to remedy them. **LEAN INTO THE PAIN**
- Lean into the pain. It cannot be outrun. You can't go around it, over it or under it; you must go through it and feel the full force of the pain to survive. Be careful not to get stuck at some phase. Keep working on your grief.
- Save time to grieve and time to face the grief. Don't throw yourself into your work or other activities that leave you no time for grieving.
- In a time of severe grief be extremely careful in the use of either alcohol or prescription drugs. Tranquilizers don't end the pain; they only mask it. This may lead to further withdrawal, loneliness and even addiction. Grief work is done best when you are awake, not drugged into sleepiness.
- Seek the help of a counselor or clergy if grief is unresolved.
- Be determined to work through your grief.

BE GOOD TO YOURSELF

- Keep a journal. It is a good way to understand what you are feeling and thinking. Hopefully, when you reread it later, you will see that you are getting better.
- Try to get adequate rest. Go to bed earlier. Avoid caffeine in coffee, tea and colas.
- Good nutrition is important.
- If Sundays, holidays, etc. are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting into these time periods.
- Read recommended books on grief. It helps you to understand what you are going through. You may find suggestions for coping.
- Moderate exercise helps (walking, tennis, swimming, etc.). Don't feel guilty if you have a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy. They would want you to live this life to the fullest and to the best of your ability.

- Do things a little differently, yet try not to make a lot of changes. This sounds like a contradiction, but it is not.
- Plan things to which you can look forward – a short trip, visit, lunch with a special friend. Start today to build memories for tomorrow.
- Find quotes or posters that are helpful to you and hang them where you can see them.
- Become involved in the needs of others. Helping others will build your self-confidence and enhance your self-worth. Join either a volunteer or support group: i.e. phoning; attending meetings; typing, collating newsletters. It does much to ease the pain.
- Be good to yourself: take a hot, relaxing bath; bask in the sun; take time for yourself (movie, theatre, dinner out, read a novel).
- Put balance in your life: pray; rest; work; read; relax. – When you feel ready, aim at regaining a healthy, balanced life by broadening your interests. Take time for activities that can bring some purpose into your life. Think about doing something you've always wanted to do: taking a class; learning tennis; volunteer work; joining church groups; becoming involved in community projects or hobby clubs. Learn and do something new as well as rediscover old interests, activities and friends.
- Remember: take your life one moment, one hour, and one day at a time.

REMEMBER – GRIEF TAKES TIME

- Do not have unrealistic expectations of yourself. Grief takes TIME. It comes and goes.
- Remember, you will get better. Hold on to HOPE. Some days you just seem to exist, but better days will be back. You will develop a renewed sense of purpose gradually.

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sorrow

GRIEF

GRIEF

loneliness worry

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Where do

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defeat

live-in-the-past

How can

depression

go now?

afraid of the future

melancholia

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WITH

HOPE – FAITH – TRUST

Then I Will Make It!!

Twelve Reflections

for the First 12 Weeks of Grief

I am reluctant to tell you here at the beginning that it has been 15 years since my world came crashing down with the sudden death of two of my three sons. My reluctance is because I can still remember how I felt in those first weeks and months, and how unbelievable I found it that anyone could continue living with half a heart torn away. My question at that time was whether I would survive at all - much less 15 years.

But minute hands do keep moving, even though you want to rip them off the face of the clock. And months keep passing, even though your life is stuck in one long, unfocused day. The good news is, you are going to live and even be glad you did. The bad news is, the moments of deep pain will still be with you after 15 years. In the moments that it all floods back, your pain will equal the pain of the first moment you got the news. However, those moments will grow farther and farther apart.

As a survivor of those first horrible weeks and months, let me share with you twelve reflections for the first twelve weeks of your grief.

1. **Shock.** Grief will make you appreciate the wonderful design by which your mind and body were created. Maybe, somewhere along the way, you became familiar with physical shock and its ability to protect you during the initial moments of trauma to some part of your body. "Grief shock" is an equally real and merciful thing that your body and your mind do to protect you from overwhelming events.



Be grateful for the numbness that arrives with horrific news. It is your mind's way of hanging a much-needed "Gone Fishing" sign on the door of your life. It is what happens naturally when your mind overloads and your emotional circuits blow.

2. **Denial.** Even after all these years, I have moments of denial. I begin to think, "Surely that freak accident did not occur! The chances of that happening are just too remote. Surely that didn't happen to my boys! Maybe that horrible story was just about someone else I used to know."

Your mind's efforts to deny what has happened to you are normal, natural, and beneficial only if your denial of the obvious continues far into the future will you need to seek professional help to cope with it.

3. **Anger.** When you have been hurt, the most natural thing in the world is to want to hurt somebody else. Unfortunately, the handiest people to hurt are those who are nearby because they love you. You may hear venomous words that you would never normally say coming out of your mouth. When it happens, say you are sorry, and recognize the human urge to lash out that is causing it.

Remember also that it is equally easy to turn your natural anger inward. Guilt is inevitable in the wake

of a life trauma. It is simply your reaction to the pain. Cut yourself some slack. Wait a while. You will be better able to deal with all that self-incrimination after your mind returns from the necessary pause it needs.

4. **Support People.** desperately want to do things to help during this time. Let them. Even though your natural tendency is to be self-sufficient, let them help. Even though you hate to impose on others, let them do things. Accept their support now and in the future. Keep reminding yourself that if the situation were reversed, you would be aching for any opportunity to provide loving support to help ease the pain.

5. **Loneliness.** Even though lots of people are going to gather around and try to console you, this is one test of life that you are going to pass all by yourself. Nobody else had the relationship you had. Nobody else is going to grieve exactly as you do. Recognizing the natural loneliness of grief can help you a lot. Be as nice as you can to those who try to help. You'll be thankful later on that you didn't explode in anger at the person who says, "I know just how you feel." They don't, but there's no explaining that to them.

6. **Loss of Desire.** For a while, almost nothing is going to seem to matter. Things you valued before are just not going to seem important for a while. Your appetites may disappear for food, for sleep, for sex, even your favorite hobby. Grief gives you a one-track mind, and it's hard to see how anybody else can be free of the same painful tunnel vision you are suffering. You may have a hard time being patient with the world around you, which appears to go on without noticing that such a life-changing event has crashed into your life.



7. **Depression.** The blues seem to be in epidemic stage in our culture today. Depression is all around us because people are constantly stressed and culturally restricted from talking honestly about what's bothering them. Depression can have many sources - anger that is felt but never expressed, loneliness that settles in for the long term, grief that won't let go. You need to talk about what you're feeling. Ignore the urging of people around you to "be strong" - that's just their way of saying that it makes them uneasy when you cry. Express your feelings of sadness. Talk them out. Also talk to a doctor to make sure there are no physical or chemical factors contributing to your depression.

8. **Confusion.** One of the most amazing memories for me at the time right after my boys died is how convinced I was that I was in complete control and behaving normally, while in reality, I was wandering around in a fog. You need to let people do things for you during this time when your mind has temporarily shut down.

People will guide you gently through the funeral events, but be careful when you try to resume your "normal" activities. Your mind is not likely to return to work as soon as you are. Don't be surprised if you find yourself lost in your own neighborhood or unable to remember a phone number you've used for years. You're not going crazy, you're just confused - and for good reason.

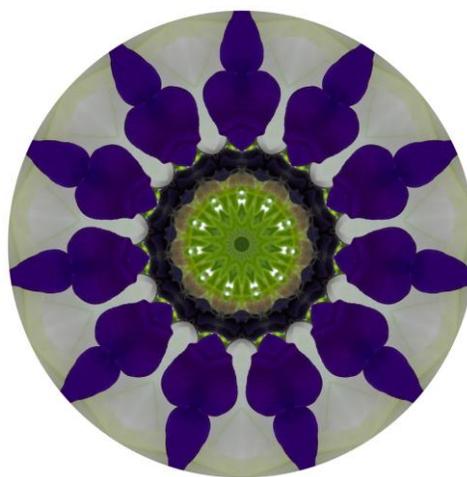
9. **Self-Care.** This is one time in your life when you need to give yourself permission to take care of yourself. You may have life-long habits of putting others first and subjugating your own needs and feelings. But, in a time of deep grief, you need to be kind to yourself. Do whatever is needed to accommodate the natural fatigue and physical changes that go with this unique period in your life.

Adjust your sleep patterns, if necessary. Do whatever it takes to survive. You will eventually be able to return to the caring for others that you value so much. For now, your primary job is to take care of yourself.

10. **Compulsive and Addictive Behaviors.** One of the symptoms of your absent mind is the tendency to get stuck on certain things that suddenly seem more important than they normally would. You may demand that things be done a certain way when, any other time, you wouldn't care how they were done.

This kind of compulsive thinking is a natural result of your confusion and hyper-focus on the tragedy, and will naturally diminish as time passes and your priorities get reorganized. In the meantime, your challenge is to balance the twin needs of "recognizing the mental confusion that goes with your situation" and "humoring yourself during this unique and transient time".

Also be careful not to over-medicate your pain with substances that can do harm. The desire to "numb" ourselves is natural when we are in a lot of pain, but the pain will remain after the substance has worn off. The more you are able to talk it out and work it out, the less your pain will drive you to unhealthy habits.



11. **God.** For people of faith, one of the hardest things to cope with in the midst of tragedy is the relationship with God. For some, faith and confidence of life after death helps diminish the natural pain of separation. For others, there is a confusing anger toward God. "Where was God when this awful thing happened?" "Did God cause it?" "Did God allow it?" "How can there be a God when this kind of thing happens"? Anger toward God is especially trying because of our natural reluctance to express it "What will people think if we say terrible things we are feeling toward God?" We are torn between long-time faith and our need to honestly express our spiritual confusion. Perhaps the most encouraging realization in this situation is that God is big enough to love you and accept your anger. Be honest with God - God can handle it.

12. **Hope.** You have never survived a life trauma exactly like the one you face now. And, there is a temptation to think there's no way you will ever get through this, but you can. You will survive, and eventually be able to say, as my surviving son wrote of his two brothers: "I am confident of our reunion".

by Charlie Walton

Write Away: Thoughts on the Art of Writing to Heal

by Joannetta Hendel

I'm a scribbler. I leave little notes here and there, "Don't forget...thought for the day...goals..." Jotting down my thoughts comes naturally to me. When Benjamin died, it was not even a conscious decision to begin writing; it was an involuntary reflex.

The first notes were records of my five-year-old's candid comments about the realities of death. "That's not fair, babies are supposed to last!" Stephanie announced indignantly. I'd find her laying a "dead" dolly to rest and fashioning a pair of angel wings from construction paper so that she could "fly up to heaven to see how Ben is doing." While Stephanie worked out her feelings in play, I worked mine out on paper.

The sudden death of my youngest child left my mind full of garbled and ever-changing chaos. The shock was intertwined with denial, which eventually gave way to anger, depression, and unrelenting guilt. Those who assured me that the worst ended with the funeral were wrong. The tension, pain and uncertainty grew with each passing day, building and feeding on itself. There is a limit to the amount of internal pandemonium that the human mind will tolerate. When I reached my limit, my mind began dumping onto paper what it couldn't process internally.

Six weeks after Benjamin's death, I sat down to write to keep from going crazy. I had no preconceived direction. The words simply poured out, a blow by blow account of the disaster that had changed my life forever. I wrote about waking to find him dead, I wrote about rushing off to the hospital in search of a miracle, I wrote about walking away from the hospital empty-handed with only Ben's pajamas in a plastic bag. Playing it back scene by scene, I recounted for myself the earliest hours, the first days, the mortuary, the funeral. The writing gave order to my mental processes. I'd created a factual account of a nightmare and became obsessed with the reading and rereading, trying to convince myself that this was real. Later came poems, letters to Ben and to God, and written messages to myself. In unpredictable spurts, my mind sought healing on paper.

"There is a limit to the amount of internal pandemonium that the human mind will tolerate. When I reached my limit, my mind began dumping onto paper what it couldn't process internally."

The human body is designed to mend itself. Given the proper attention, cuts and bruises heal, broken bones are repaired. The injured mind has the same qualities of restoration as the physical body. Emotional wounds are slowly and carefully restored to balance. However, the resolution of emotional trauma can be facilitated through concrete expression. There is an undeniable need for a physical outlet, a method of sorting and bringing forth internal stress.

The bereaved experience an instantaneous overload in mental and emotional clutter. Stifled, left to fester and grow, emotional hurts infect the mind and soul. The need to do something with their grief, to work it through, becomes a primary focus for bereaved individuals. Grief can seek verbal expression—the overpowering need to talk about one’s loss. Grief can seek visual expression through any number of artistic endeavors. Music is a catharsis for some. The paths to internal healing are varied, but the written expression of grief is unsurpassed in therapeutic potential.

Writing is a form of self-expression, self-examination, and self-therapy. It is a means of externalizing the internal and facilitates the mind’s natural tendency to seek release.

Writing to heal requires no particular talent.

Begin very simply with, “I feel...” Make uncomplicated statements about anger, about

fear, about pain. The words will follow, thought processes will expand. As with any other endeavor, skills of written expression are gained with practice.

“The paths to internal healing are varied, but the written expression of grief is unsurpassed in therapeutic potential.”

The lives of bereaved individuals are filled with chaos. Expect early therapeutic writing to reflect that confusion. Helping to sort and to clarify, writing provides an opportunity to pinpoint feelings. Many individuals understand what they feel only after seeing it on paper. No boundaries nor restraints should be placed on the words that flow from pen or keyboard. The bereaved will find himself doing what he needs to do to heal, writing what he needs to write to set the mind free. The heavy mental concentration involved in writing opens the door to an altered state of consciousness. This state of mind paves the way for insights and perceptions that might not be available at other times. Respect and follow all internal leads, expecting answers to come in their own way and in their own time.

Writing can be considered a memorial to a lost loved one, and it can take a variety of forms and directions. There is value in writing a detailed account of the deceased’s life, the qualities shared within that relationship. Begin at the beginning, writing about the loss and what that loss has meant. Capture all random thoughts and fleeting memories with the first draft. Polishing can come much later. Talk with the deceased on paper about the relationship, the positive as well as the negative. Remembering the good as

well as the bad times makes the story real. Use pictures and memorabilia, to recall the events, the history. Memories and feelings will come flooding back. Recalling one memory will trigger another and another. Most people are surprised at exactly how much they are able to remember, one thought invariably leading to a dozen more. Elaborate on feelings in the story form as well as through letters. Consider poetry when the feelings become jumbled and imprecise. Thoughts can be condensed into concise, manageable size when prose is converted to poetic verse.

It can be helpful to write about the death, the days leading up to and away from it, the details and events that form the fabric and the scenario. Thoughts and feelings that are just too painful to express in words can now find their way out on paper. The pictures within will take concrete form through the written word. Whether sudden or anticipated, death often leaves the bereaved with an overwhelming sense of unfinished business, a need for completion. Writing offers an opportunity to say what could not be said when the loved one was alive. In addition, it offers a chance to say good-bye.

Written words provide a safe means of discharging anger. “Why did you leave me?” can be screamed out on paper. Doctors with human frailties, reckless drivers, and a mysterious God can all be called to task. Guilts, whether justified or contrived, can be expressed and forgiveness sought. This is an opportunity to apologize, to make amends. Consider writing from the perspective of the deceased. A powerful exercise in self-examination can occur when we allow ourselves to adopt the frame of mind and thought processes of the one who has died.

“Grief can be such an overpowering experience that the bereaved is sometimes left with a feeling of certain hopelessness. But through journal notations it is possible to discern movement and motion, to track significant growth and advancement.”

Significant parts of that person live within us, that personality very much alive through stored memories and shared experiences. Spending some time in the deceased’s room or favorite place, sitting in the special chair, sorting through his things, heightens our sense of that other person. Writing from his or her perspective can offer soothing assurances and spiritual insights about the individual’s life and death.

A bereaved individual may want to keep a journal reflecting personal experiences with grief. A chronological record of the grief process can be an invaluable tool in the resolution of loss. Day to day thoughts and experiences can be noted in as much or as little detail as is comfortable. Note, as well, the mental processing that is done at night through dreams. Grief can be such an overpowering experience that the bereaved is sometimes left with a feeling of certain hopelessness. But through journal notations it is possible to discern movement and motion, to track significant growth and advancement. A journal is a record of where an individual has been, one that offers tremendous personal insight.

Writing takes time, but the opportunities to write are all around us. Carry a notebook to preserve fleeting thoughts that come at random times—while riding in the car, during routine daily tasks, through conversations with others who knew the deceased. Put no time limits on your writing, and don't try to tell the story all at once. Instead, do it bit by bit, little by little, as is comfortable. The spaces between the writing are as valuable to the process as the writing itself. Don't rush. Allow time for what has been learned to do its internal work. Consider, as well, sharing some of what is written with a trusted friend. Sharing ourselves with another person validates our feelings and experiences.

Indulge in the reading and rereading of what has been written, and read aloud from the written work as often as possible. The therapeutic value of reading aloud cannot be over-estimated. Feelings that remain barely shrouded beneath the surface emerge with overwhelming intensity and power when given a verbal voice. There is pain in

“Welcome the expression of strong, powerful emotions. Making peace with pain is the essence of the resolution of grief.”

therapeutic writing, just as there is pain in grieving. The written expression of grief is designed to play back the sadness and the heartache. But as the bereaved relives, re-experiences, pain opens the doors to a heightened level of emotional health, and the accompanying tears are an important exercise in the healing process. Welcome the expression of strong, powerful emotions. Making peace with pain is the essence of the resolution of grief.

We all possess the innate ability to heal. Writing heals the heart, the mind, and the soul. Each written word opens doors—to the past and to the future, and to a heightened sense of peacefulness and emotional well-being. Therapeutic writing becomes a gift to oneself and to the memory of the one we've loved and lost. Above all, expect miracles from therapeutic writing. There is magic in the written word.

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**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

“What Can You Do to Help?”

Suggestions for the Friends and Relatives of the Grieving Survivor

A child has died. Regardless of the child’s age or the circumstances of death, as a person wishing to give support, you feel empty and helpless. What can you say or do that will ease the pain and help mend the hurt?

What Can You Do to Help?

There are no easy answers, no standard approaches that are universally helpful. There are no magic formulas that will make the pain go away. It is natural to feel helpless when the child of a friend or relative dies. Remember that showing your loving concern can be very comforting to a grieving family. Please don’t avoid them because you feel inadequate. Families are more likely to reach a healthy, positive resolution of their grief if they receive continuing support and understanding. The following suggestions may help you provide that support:

- Don’t try to find magic words that will take away the pain. There aren’t any. A hug, a touch, and a simple, “I’m so sorry,” offer real comfort and support.
- Don’t be afraid to cry. Your tears are a tribute to both child and parents. Yes, the parents may cry with you, but their tears can be a healthy release.
- Avoid saying, “I know how you feel.” It is very difficult to comprehend the depth of the loss when a child dies, and to say you do may seem presumptuous to the parents.
- Avoid using “It was God’s will” and other clichés that attempt to minimize or explain the death. Don’t try to find something positive in the child’s death, such as, “At least you have other children.” There are no words that make it all right that their child has died.
- Listen! Let them express the anger, the questions, the pain, the disbelief, and the guilt they may be experiencing. Understand that parents often have a need to talk about their child and the circumstances of the death over and over again. It may be helpful to encourage them to talk by asking a gentle question such as, “Can you tell me about it?”
- Avoid judgments of any kind. “You should . . .” or “You shouldn’t . . .” is not appropriate or helpful. Decisions and behaviors related to displaying or removing photographs, reliving the death, idealizing the child, or expressing anger, depression, or guilt may appear extreme in many cases. These behavior patterns are normal, particularly in the first years following the child’s death.
- Be aware that, for parents with religious convictions, their child’s death may raise serious questions about God’s role in this event. Do not presume to offer answers. If the parents raise the issue, it would be better to listen and allow them to explore their own feelings. They will need to arrive at an individual philosophy about this.
- Be there. Run errands, help with household chores, provide child care, and help in whatever way is needed. Don’t say, “Call me if there is anything I can do.” That call will probably never come. Be aware of what needs to be done and offer to do specific tasks.

- Give special attention to surviving children. They are hurt, confused, and often ignored. Don't assume they are not hurting because they do not express their feelings. Many times siblings will suppress their grief to avoid adding to their parents' pain. Talk to them and acknowledge their loss.
- Mention the name of the child who has died. Don't fear that talking about the child will cause the parents additional pain. The opposite is usually true. Using the child's name lets parents know that they are not alone in remembering their child.
- Be patient. Understand that grieving family members respond differently to their pain. Some verbalize, others may seem unable or unwilling to talk, some withdraw, and others strike out angrily.
- Sharing fond memories of the child through statements such as "I remember when she . . ." or "He had a wonderful gift for . . ." can be reassuring to parents and show that you appreciated their child and are aware of their sense of loss. Relate amusing anecdotes about the child. Don't be afraid of laughter. It helps to heal the hurt.
- Remember the family on important days such as the child's birthday and death anniversaries. Send a card, call, or visit. Let them know you remember, too.
- Gently encourage a return to outside activities. Suggest a lunch or movie as relief from the isolation of grief. If your invitation is declined, don't give up! Ask again and again, if necessary. The third or fourth time you call may be just the day that an outing would be welcome if someone took the initiative.
- There is no standard timetable for recovery. Grief usually lasts far longer than anyone expects. Encourage bereaved families to be patient with themselves. They often hear, "Get on with your life; it's time you got over this!" Those demands are unfair and unrealistic. When parents express concern about being tired, depressed, angry, tearful, unable to concentrate, or are unwilling to get back into life's routines, reassure them that grief work takes time and that they may be expecting too much of themselves too soon.
- Be sensitive to the changes a bereaved family experiences. Family members will adopt new behaviors and roles as they learn to live without the child. This is a painful and lengthy process. Don't expect your friends to be unchanged by this experience.
- Refer a grieving family to The Compassionate Friends, which has more than 640 U.S. chapters providing friendship, understanding, and hope to bereaved families. Many types of online support are available including TCF's comprehensive website at www.compassionatefriends.org (that includes an Online Support Community), as well as TCF's Facebook and Twitter pages. Call TCF's National Office toll-free at 877-969-0010 for chapter referral information and to request a no-charge customized bereavement packet.
- Continue your contact with the family. Grief does not end at the funeral or on the first anniversary. Stay in touch often, and in conversation, as easily as you would mention any other member of the family, don't forget to mention the name of the child who died.

On behalf of all families involved in The Compassionate Friends, we thank you for caring enough to want to help. Your loving concern makes **YOU** a compassionate friend.

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