



The Compassionate Friends Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Wyandotte & Johnson County

November, December, 2019, January 2020 Volume 8 Issue 1

For the Newly Bereaved

We welcome you, we are sorry for the cause that brings you to us and we know how devastated you are. We have all been there. Nothing is required of you and there are no dues or fees. You need not speak a word or you can share. Attending your first meeting does take courage, but our members who attend find a comforting network of support, friendship and understanding that only friends who have "been there" can give. Based on our experiences, we suggest you attend three or four meetings before evaluating the benefit of our group to you. Just come, be as comfortable as you can and let us walk with you.

Meetings are a place to talk about your child, a place to remember the joys of their life and the pain and struggle of living without them. It is a place to meet other parents who have in fact survived what may seem impossible to you right now.

Meetings are not "the answer." Grief is not a problem to be solved and meetings are not "pity parties" although there are tears and sadness, but there is also hope.

Meetings do not bring about closure. You close on a house, not the death of a child.

May you find your own peaceful solution to fit your individual needs for coping with special dates which are painful after losing your child. We are here to help.

Janet G. Reyes
TCF Alamo Area Chapter, TX

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

—Albert Schweitzer—

*Life's unfairness is not irrevocable;
we can help balance the scales for others, if not always for
ourselves. ~*

Hubert H. Humphrey

*He that conceals his grief finds no remedy for it ~ Turkish
Proverb*

WYANDOTTE COUNTY

Eisenhower Community Center
2901 North 72nd St., KCKS
Richard Moore 913-238-1890
Marlene Moore 913-238-5348
1st Tuesday @ 7PM

JOHNSON COUNTY

Advent Lutheran Church
11800 W. 151st St.
Olathe, Ks
Gay Kahler & Brian Janes
913-764-2669

WWW.JOCOTCF.ORG

UPCOMING EVENTS

December 3, WyCo

Candle Lighting

December 8th, Worldwide

Candle Lighting

REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Barbara Starr
816-229-2640
Email: barbarastarr@live.com
and
Gay Kahler
913-764-2669
Email: jocotcf@hotmail.com

National Office

The Compassionate Friends
PO Box 3696
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696
877-969-0010
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org
www.compassionatefriends.org

Tradition, Tradition, Tradition

Even in normal times, tradition isn't what it is always cracked up to be, and sometimes "tradition" gets in the way of sanity. Often we cling to tradition because it's easier, we don't want to offend others, we don't want to be embarrassed, or we don't know what else to do. When you are a grieving parent, giving in to tradition can drive you over the edge.

I found myself in the "tradition predicament" regarding putting up a tree the first Christmas holiday after my son, Chad died. I didn't want, need, or have the energy to put up a tree. Yet other family members wanted a tree and they wanted it as it always had been, big, bright, and decorated with ornaments they had purchased or made through the years. What eventually took place, with regard to a tree, changed our holiday forever and it has been a good thing for everyone involved.

I don't know the exact circumstances of how our "new tradition" came into being that first year. But I do remember frustration, tears, and upset people. I also remember my daughter saying to me it was her Christmas too and she needed a tree. It was her older brother, the one she remembered getting up with every Christmas morning when she was little that was dead, and she had to have something so she could deal with the emptiness. So she came up with a plan. She and her father would go find a tree and she would take care of the decorations all by herself.

That was ten Christmases ago and this year, once again, my husband and my daughter will leave early in the morning, a week before Christmas, and hunt for a tree, just the two of them. When they come home, I will prepare breakfast, while they get the tree in the holder, and move the furniture. We will sit down together and enjoy our meal and then my husband and I will leave for several hours. During that time we will do whatever we feel like doing. We have gone to the cemetery, gone for walks, gone to the bookstore, visited friends, etc. When we return, my daughter will have decorated our Christmas tree, and the whole house!

Every year the tree has been different, limited only to my daughter's imagination and the budget we keep her on. She didn't use our regular ornaments for a while and when she did, she told me ahead of time and said how meaningful it was for her to be the one who put Chad's ornaments back on the tree. We have continued this "new tradition" to this day. Now, I find angel ornaments to put on the tree to honor our missing angel, and enjoy with my husband, sons, and family, my daughter's traditional tribute to her brother. This "changing tradition" has been so healing. Our family has had the brightness and beauty that a lighted tree can provide, and I have been able to save my energy for other things I wanted to do.

During the next few weeks, I hope you will make the activities of the season as stress free as you can. I hope that you will feel free to experiment with new traditions, knowing there is no "right way" to go through this season, only "your way." I hope that you will remember Christmas is only one day and that the time leading up to that "one day" will probably be more difficult than the actual day. And finally, I hope for peace in your hearts, if not today then tomorrow, or the tomorrow after, or the tomorrow after that.

Sue Anderson
TCF, South Bend, IN
In Memory of my son, Chad

TO OUR NEW COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

If you are newly bereaved and have recently attended your first meeting, you may have left the meeting feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared at meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return. We would like to let you know that these feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least **three** tries before you decide whether or not the meetings are for you. You will find a network of caring and support which will help you as you travel your grief journey, and most assuredly, you will find hope along the way. We truly care about you and want to make certain that no bereaved parent ever needs to walk this path alone.

Looking for Your Gift

Bereaved families often face the holidays with fear and trepidation. Just the fact, holidays continue to go on, can cause outrage. Our sadness is monumental, and causes our bodies to resist moving on. We need to be gentle with ourselves; we are going through an emotional rehabilitation. Holidays often renew our grief, even if we are a distance from fresh grief.

We need to selectively choose what traditions are important to our family. If we over commit, we set ourselves up for a let down when we cannot meet our goals. If you have some traditions that are very important and you are not physically up to doing them, you will find friends and extended family will feel honored if you ask for their help. Most people want to help you get through the holidays, but don't know what to do. Give them the opportunity to feel they are helpful in your healing.

Grieving cannot be put on the shelf until the holidays are over. We need to take time to feel our grief, and express our sadness. We also need to take time to try and put a bit of normality in our lives. We must remember it is not disrespectful to laugh. I'm sure our loved one would want us to surround ourselves with caring people who can help us through the holidays. A caring supportive person is one who encourages us to be the best we can be, not one who expects us to be as we used to be.

Our healing will eventually cause our pain to move out and make room for our loved ones memories. We learn to make a new life for ourselves. Holidays get better and we learn how to live again.

We tend to think of life's richest moments as being the joyous, fun filled, carefree days prior to losing our children and siblings. But, as I search for the most meaningful things that have given me strength and a real appreciation for life, they certainly do include the pain, overcoming my despair, losing my son, grandson, and six siblings. We cherish the friendships that doesn't always demand a smiling face, and those with the warm touch that says, "share your pain, let me be a part of your grief, don't worry about making us uneasy with tears, we have all been there." Much healing can take place through sharing as we learn to be very honest and courageous with our feelings, which helps us to find hope. Hope helps to restore our love for life, and gives us the strength to survive.

This holiday we will all miss our loved ones, who are no longer with us. Though it has been through much pain, you probably have never been so close to your child or sibling, or shared such a large part of your life with them. We hope the memories that ache with pain, can also bring you thoughts of love. For those of us who are further removed from our early grief, who can look back and appreciate the strength for our struggle, the compassion from seeing other's pain, wanting to become functional human beings again so we can contribute to making a better world, are gifts our children and siblings have given to us for our survival. These gifts are greater than any fancy bow tied box can contain. Look for your gifts and cherish them.

Marie Hofmockel
TCF Valley Forge, PA

Breakfast With Dads

A breakfast for men started several months ago and has been very well received by the men who have attended. **It's scheduled for the 1st Saturday of the month (subject to change) at Buddy McFadden's house, 8625 Baska Ct., Lenexa, Ks**

The men sign up to bring a casserole or some breakfast dish, fruit, rolls, etc.

The time is from 8:30-10:30

If you are interested and would like to be added to the e-mail group for updates to the meetings,

Please contact Buddy at 913-481-9581 or Chuck Findley at 913-302-2954

Johnson County Information

Our Children & Siblings; Loved & Remembered

Births

November

- 6th *Kyle Gabriel Eller, child of Jennifer & David Eller*
- 6th *Ariana Leigh Caraway, child of Shera McClelland*
- 11th *Gregory Bernard Dermer, child of Diane Dermer*
- 11th *Teddy Breidenthal, child of Joni & Ted Breidenthal*
- 18th *Nick Viscek, child of Trish Viscek*
- 20th *Colin Scott, child of Mark & Cindy Scott*
- 22nd *Alexandra (Alex) Rumpel, child of Irina Galkina*
- 24th *Jenny Anne Johnson, child of Susan & Jeff Johnson*
- 25th *Alex (Allie) Lahr, child of Amy & Bob Lahr*
- 27th *Andrew Caraway, child of Shera Grimm*
- 27th *Hunter Krentz, child of Ron & Ginger Adams*

December

- 10th *Jace Boxberger, child of Tyler & Kelli Boxberger*
- 11th *Tori Jade Peavler, child of Susan & Tim Peavler*
- 14th *Mark Skedel, child of Ralph & Laura Spillers*
- 16th *Austin Hawkey, child of Kim Bergeron*
- 19th *Keisha Clay, child of Carla & Frank Smocks*
- 23rd *Augie Echeandia, child of Augie Echeandia*
- 25th *Nathan James Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
- 25th *Ethan Thomas Heavilin, child of Marilyn & Glen Heavilin*
- 30th *Laura Michelle Travis, child of Gay Kahler & Brian Janes*

January

- 2nd *Michael Silverio, child of Dana Bamberger*
- 7th *Deana Lori Kaitala, child of Rochelle Jones*
- 8th *Adam Ward, child of Sharon Ward*
- 9th *Patrick Spaulding, child of Yvonne & Scott Spaulding*
- 12th *Danny Poore, child of Deb & Darryl Poore*
- 16th *Thor Rodenbaugh, child of Chris & Ron Rodenbaugh*
- 15th *Jason Holmes, child of Karhi & Mike Holmes*
- 20th *Brian Cupp, child of Kathy Grassy*
- 23rd *Jeffrey Neil Crump, child of Paul & Ann Crump*

Deaths

November

- 5th *Kevin Babson, child of Rick & Sue Babson*
- 11th *Thor Rodenbaugh, child of Chris & Ron Rodenbaugh*
- 14th *Daniel Shore, child of Gisele Shore*
- 23rd *Jana Elizabeth Pinker, child of Bob & Rebecca Pinker*
- 27th *Robert Leiker, child of Kim & Randy Leiker*
- 29th *Kyle Gabriel Eller, child of Jennifer & David Eller*

December

- 7th *Mark Skedel, child of Ralph & Laura Spillers*
- 13th *Matthew Thomas Billings, child of Jude Billings*
- 16th *Sterling Franzwa, child of Fred & Sandy Franzwa*
- 26th *Austin Hawkey, child of Kim Bergeron*
- 31st *Joel Streufert, child of Sherry Streufert*

January

- 5th *Ethan Thomas Heavilin, child of Marilyn and Glen Heavilin*
- 5th *Lara Rogers, child of Tim & Janet Rogers*
- 5th *Kyle Bunselmeyer, child of Suzette Bunselmeyer*
- 12th *Amy Batson, child of Barbara & Don Batson*
- 12th *Shane Day, child of Melody Gau*
- 21ST *Vincent Boos, child of John & Rochelle Boos, (Mariah, sister)*

The Surviving Children

Being a parent is never easy. When one's child dies, it is even more difficult being parents to the children who survive. In those first days and weeks, shock may cause us to make decisions (or allow others to make them) that we will later regret. We may wish later that we had included the children more, that we had not permitted ourselves to be isolated from them, that we had explained things differently. Most of us never expect to face this situation, so we have never thought through in advance what the best course would be.

At some point in our grief, we do become more sensitive to these "forgotten grievers" who have lost a brother or sister. They are having struggles of their own. The first thing to remember is that everything going on with our other children is not caused by the death. They are still, through it all, growing up, going through the various developmental stages that have always concerned parents. Any special problems they had before will not have magically disappeared. Just as we proclaim repeatedly that there is no one way for a parent to grieve, so each child has his own style and timetable for everything, and we cannot control these. We can only try to understand and help when we can. We cannot make it "go away" any more than we can make any of the other harsh realities of life go away.

The very foundations of life has been shaken. The home, so sheltering and safe, has been invaded by forces our surviving children do not understand and parents, who seemed all-powerful and all-wise, may have been reduced to quavering, uncertain robots. Probably for the first time, death-whatever that is-has claimed someone who is not old. Worse, if there has been the usual quota of sibling rivalry and squabbling, the child may be afraid that he has caused the death by being "bad," or by wishing there were no such bothersome person to have to share with or "take a back seat to."

Just as every child is different, every relationship is different. Feelings toward an older brother or sister who was protector, teacher, idol, and those toward a younger one who may have been a sometime responsibility, hanger-on, biggest fan, are not the same. They may have been best friends or rivals who didn't get along very well. Their responses to the death will be as varied as our own.

A child's place in the family system is changed. The second oldest finds himself suddenly the big brother. The buffer between the others may be gone. Most difficult of all, a child may have become an "only child." Any child younger than the one who died has to go through the scary years of being the same age. Similar symptoms and situations are so frightening. Brothers and sisters often do look and behave very much alike, and these resemblances can be a source of discomfort or of pride. There may be efforts to exaggerate these, to replace the missing child, to make things the way they used to be.

What can we as parents do to help? Most of all, our children need reassurance and honesty. They need to know they are loved and that the family and the home will continue. They need all the facts they can understand. Part of this honesty requires that they know of your grief. By your actions, you can teach them it is okay to cry (even fathers!), it is okay to admit you are angry at "life" for being this way, that you too are confused about "why." Maintaining a "stiff upper lip" in front of the children only encourages them to suppress their feelings.

Try to be available when they want to talk, but be prepared for the possibility that they may not want to talk with you about their feelings. Many children hold back because they are afraid they might make you cry. You can try explaining that you are not worried about that, but they may still prefer to talk to someone else.

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HANDLING THE HOLIDAYS

*The following guidelines are shared in the hope that they will be helpful to you in thinking about and planning for the holidays ahead and other special family times throughout the year. They were prepared by Shirley Melin of The Compassionate Friends, Fox Valley Chapter, Aurora IL with some additions from the Montgomery, AL Chapter, and from the booklet, **Handling the Holidays**, edited by Bruce Conley, a funeral director in Elburn IL and a member of the Advisory Board of the Fox Valley Chapter. We are most grateful to all of these people for sharing with us.*

Holidays, birthdays, and other special days are usually times for family gatherings and celebrations. When we come together for the first time after the death of our child, it can be really difficult. Our families try to protect us in the best way they can, but it can still hurt. How can we cope? How can we as grieving parents handle these times in a realistic and effective way?

First, acknowledge and accept your feelings. Tears, depression, and loneliness are all natural reactions to a loss, months, even a year or more after the loss. At the same time, do not feel as though you are betraying your child if you are able to enjoy some of the festivities.

If the thought of preparing for these special days seems overwhelming, one helpful first step may be to make a list of things to be done in planning for the holiday. Have a family conference and together decide what is really important: what traditions do you want to carry on? What would some members find meaningful, or what things might be too painful? What changes, if any, would you want to make? Consider whether a task can be shared, whether someone else can take it on, or whether it should be eliminated. Whatever decisions are reached, this sharing can demonstrate recognition and respect for each person's values.

In setting priorities, good guidelines to use are: Would the holiday or special day be the same without it? What gave meaning to our holidays in the past? If you have family traditions, decide together whether you want to carry them on this year or if this is a good time to begin new ones. Consider and discuss ways of keeping traditions while trying to lessen the pain of loss, perhaps by making some changes in the usual way of doing things. Remember that although we may decide to do some things differently this year, we can decide to return to earlier customs another year if we wish.

It is important to realize that while holidays and special days are traditionally a time of festivity, they can also be a time of frantic busyness and resultant fatigue. Don't set unrealistic expectations for yourself to be joyful. As grieving persons we must recognize that we may simply be unable to function at our usual pace. We may need to break things down into smaller, more manageable chunks, goals we can achieve. Fatigue can be deadly and lead to feelings of depression under the best of circumstances. Don't overextend, don't over commit. Eliminate the unnecessary and reduce the pressure on yourself and others. By talking over what is really important with family members, priorities can be set, tasks shared, and plans made to accomplish those things considered essential. Decide what you can handle comfortably and let your needs be known to friends and relatives.

If your faith has been an important part of your life, allow time for its expression during these holidays and special days. If it has not, this may be a fitting time to approach the clergyperson or church of your choice. In either case, you may find that by enriching and deepening your religious experience, you have added a new dimension to your life.

Our lives have changed. Our holidays will be different. It's not a choice of pain or no pain, but how we manage the pain we feel. The important thing to remember is to do what is comfortable for you and your family. It may help to know what those of us who have been through these holidays and special days before have found: Anticipation is frequently worse than the day itself.

Continued on next page

SOME SUGGESTIONS:**Know when your holidays are**

- Holidays are not just at Thanksgiving, Chanukah, Christmas, or New Year's.
- Holidays are those times when family and friends get together for fun. It may or may not be associated with one of the traditional days of celebration.
- Mark on your calendar the months during which your family's holidays occur.
- Begin early to plan your coping strategies.

Be intentional about how you plan your holiday. Together, as a family, examine the events and tasks of the celebration and ask the following questions:

- Do we really enjoy doing this? Is it done out of habit, free choice, or obligation?
- Is this a task that can be shared?
- WOULD THE HOLIDAY BE THE SAME WITHOUT IT?

Decide what you can handle comfortably.

- Whether we are open to talk about our child.
- Whether we feel able to send holiday cards this year.
- Whether we can handle the responsibility of the family dinner, holiday parties, etc. or if we wish someone else to take over some of these traditions this year.
- Whether we will stay at home for the holidays or choose a different environment.
- ♦ Shopping is definitely easier if you make the entire list out ahead of time. Then when one of the "good days" comes along, you can get your shopping done quickly and with less confusion. Shopping by phone or from catalogs can also help.

Don't be afraid to make changes. It can really make things less painful.

- Let the children take over decorating the tree or invite friends in to help.
- Open presents the night before the holiday instead of in the morning.
- Have dinner at a different time. Change the seating arrangement.
- Burn a special candle to quietly include your absent son or daughter.

Our greatest comfort may come in doing something for others.

- Giving a gift in memory of our child to a meaningful charity.
- Adopting a needy family for the holidays.
- Inviting a guest (foreign student, senior citizen, someone who would otherwise be alone) to share the festivities.

Evaluate your coping plans.

- Do your plans isolate you from those who love and support you best?
- Do your plans allow for meaningful expression and celebration of what the particular holiday means for you?

Let your plans and limits be known.

- Write or phone family and friends to let them know of any intended changes.
- Share with friends and family how you plan to approach the holiday and how they can best help you.

Don't be afraid to have fun.

Enjoyment, laughter, and pleasure are not experiences in which you abandon your lost child. You have not forgotten him/her. Your child would not want you to be forever sad; you need not feel guilty over any enjoyment you may experience.

- Give yourself and members of your family permission to celebrate and take pleasure in the holiday.

Last and most important: Take time to love and let yourself be loved — for this is the real gift of the holiday season.



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

The Compassionate Friends
Debbie McFadden, editor
8625 Baska Ct.
Lenexa, Ks 66219

Phone : 913-636-4990
E-Mail: bdmcfadden@gmail.com

JOHNSON COUNTY WEBSITE
www.tcfkc.org

The mission of The Compassionate Friends: 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.

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They may be ashamed of some common reactions such as feelings of anger, guilt, jealousy, even relief. Perhaps you can help them find someone they can talk to comfortably. They may have already found such a person without you realizing it.

Be honest in the way you remember the child who has died. It is tempting to reminisce about only the good and wonderful qualities, but was this really a saint? Surely not. Recall, and talk about, the not-so-good and wonderful things too. Be sure you are remembering a real child, for everyone's sake. A saint is hard to live up to. Talking with other parents at a meeting of The Compassionate Friends can give you practical suggestions about things that have worked for other families. You will hear ideas you may not have thought of. Some will have received help from caring professionals and you may decide to consult someone too. When you recognize your family in what others are saying, you may decide that you and your children are really doing pretty well, hurting and healing together and that it just takes longer than you thought it would.

Ronnie Peterson
TCF Star Lake, NY

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS CREDO

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.

TCF, Inc. 2007