



# The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

January-February 2023

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## SNOW

Every snowflake that falls is unique and has its own individual design. There are beautiful patterns in each snowflake and even the tiniest of flakes have their own markings. These patterns change again and again...even after the flake touches the ground. Each snowflake is a cause for wonder; each flake is one of a kind. No two are exactly alike.

Like the snowflake, our beautiful children were unique and special; some we only dreamed about and some danced upon the earth. They filled our lives with wonder and transformed our world. We held them too briefly, but we will hold them in our hearts forever. We shall remember them always.

At this time of remembering, it may help to reflect upon how our lives have been enriched by the love we have given and the love we have received from our children. Our children leave treasures behind that time can never take away.

~Denise Falzon, TCF/Lake Area, MI

## New Year's Day

Twelve days from now  
Will be the date Amy slipped away.  
Six years, four months, twelve days  
Since Sarah left to play.

Among the clouds and stars,  
In heaven's realm they wait  
For Mom and Dad to join them  
Inside the pearly gates.

What joyous times await us  
When we meet with our girls!  
We'll hug and love and kiss them  
Running fingers though dark curls.

For now, each day eternity  
As we mark time until  
Our aching hearts and crying eyes  
Will stop, if it's God's will.

No fireworks or parties  
As this year finally ends.  
The next year comes to struggle through,  
Thank God for family and friends.

-- Barbara Batson South Kansas City

Each person's  
grief journey  
is as unique as  
a fingerprint or a snowflake.

~ Earl Grollman



## Guilt It's What Our Brain Does

by Dr. Bob Baugher

After your loved one died, did you find yourself saying things such as: I should've, I shouldn't have, If only, I wish I would've, or Why didn't I? If so, you are part of a very large group of humans who have felt guilty following a death. It doesn't matter whether the death took place thousands of miles away or in your home. It matters less whether your loved one died in an accident, in a war setting, or due to an internal war. What matters is that this precious person is no longer in your life. You awaken each day with the harsh realization that the worst has happened. Your future looks uncertain. Those around try to help, but your grief is a dizzying array of emotions and thoughts. And one of the most common emotions of grief is guilt. As we examine this grief reaction, the most important fact to keep in mind is that guilt is a feeling. You cannot talk someone out of a feeling. That's why, when people say, "Don't feel guilty," we don't respond with, "OK, thanks. I feel much better now." Next, let's look at types of guilt and suggestions for coping with it. See if any of these apply to you.

### TYPES OF GUILT

**Survivor guilt:** You feel guilty because you are alive and your loved one is not. Or you think it should have been you who died instead of your loved one.

### Benefit guilt:

Did money come to you following the death? If you received any sort of benefit, guilt will raise its financial head.

### Role-failure guilt:

You look back on your life and feel bad because you weren't good enough (pick one): spouse/

parent/sibling/grandparent/friend/relative. When a death occurs, your brain goes back into the past and reviews all the events and interactions with the person who died. It's easy to dwell on all the past wrongs.

**Death-causation guilt:**

Although you didn't directly cause the death, you may have felt that you should have or could have done something—anything—to prevent the death. If so, you are experiencing death-causation guilt.

**Grief guilt:**

Have you somehow felt that you weren't grieving right: crying enough, angry enough, sad enough, tough enough? Or perhaps you felt that you were crying too much or overly angry or too depressed or weak. Remember, you grieve however you grieve. There is absolutely no right or wrong way.

**Moving-on guilt:**

Have you laughed again? Done things for pleasure? Gotten involved in new activities? Have you felt guilty about it? This is one of the most significant challenges in coping with a death. After someone we love dies, we still get out of bed (even though we may not feel like it). Time keeps moving and suddenly it's a month. You know when it's been exactly a month because that date has been forever etched in your brain. Months turn into years and you realize that you have no choice but to live your life, even though it's not the one you wanted. Time has forced you to move on. You realize that moving on does not mean forgetting. You will never forget the life this wonderful person lived. But time has moved you forward and guilt arises.

**COPING WITH GUILT**

Let's look next at some suggestions for coping with guilt. These suggestions came from bereaved people themselves. For my book *Understanding Guilt During Bereavement*, I asked many people what helped them in coping with guilt following the death of their loved one. Here is what they said:

**Educate yourself:** By reading this article you have taken a step toward making a little more sense of your guilt.

**Watch your self-talk:** For a time, go ahead and beat yourself up with the should have and if only thoughts.

But pick a date in the future, such as the birthday of your loved one and make a decision to cease using these negative terms. When you start to say, "I should've" catch yourself by saying, "Okay, stop this kind of talk." Consider it a gift from your loved one.

**Compile memories:** Write stories or record them on a voice recorder or video. It can be called "I remember the time when..." Contact friends and relatives to ask them for stories, pictures, and videos of your loved one.

**Forgive yourself:** At various times during the week, ask yourself, "What would it take for me to begin to forgive myself?"

**Write a list of all you did wrong and all you did right:** It is important to get all the things you feel guilty about out of your head and onto paper. It's easy to beat yourself up for the negatives, but you also need to look at the positives.

**Perform a guilt ritual:** In a workshop I presented at the TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors) conference for families who's loved one died in the military, I passed out small, polished rocks to each participant, telling them it was their guilt rock. They were to take it home and, as time went by and they began to feel less guilt, they moved the rock further away until they could finally throw it away. Another example of a guilt ritual was shared by a TAPS mother whose support group used a guilt candle. She thought about the guilt she felt for letting her son join the military, and when she blew out the candle, it felt like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

**Find individual or group support:** If you have found that your guilt and your grief are interfering with your ability to work on your activities of daily living, finding a counselor who understands grief and loss may help. Some people have discovered that a support group, such as TAPS where people share feelings of grief and suggestions for coping with it, has been the best thing they've done for themselves since the death occurred. Many people have said to me, "Bob, without TAPS, I don't know where I'd be today. It saved my life."

**Create a chat with your loved one:** This is an exercise some people find

difficult to do. Put down this magazine for a minute and do the following: imagine that your loved one is going to visit you for 20 seconds and say something to you about all the guilt you've been feeling since the death. Imagine that this person is standing in front of you. Listen. Go ahead, do this now. What words do you hear? Next, take out a pen and paper and write down those words. Understand that these words are a gift that this person has given to you. Accept the gift.

**Channel your guilt:** One way people cope with the guilt and anger over the death of a loved one is to channel it into a worthwhile project. Ask yourself, "What can I do now to help others in the name of my loved one?" Guilt is a natural reaction to a significant loss. As the years go on, you may find that guilt may still pay you a visit. Guilt feelings are our brain's way of attempting to make sense of something that defies logic. I hope you will find something in this article to give you insight into the types of guilt and tools for coping with it. I wish you a life filled with little guilt and many positive memories of the life this person lived.

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## Grief and Valentine's Day

I don't want to alarm you, but I just had a look at the calendar and it's almost Valentine's Day. I know some of you were planning to skip from February 13 straight to February 15th, but I can't let you do that because then you'd be living a day ahead of everyone and you'd miss all your appointments and favorite TV. Valentine's Day is one of those "I appreciate you" holidays, like Mother's Day and Father's Day. As such, there's a whole faction of people who would prefer to ignore the holiday altogether...you know...because the person they're supposed to appreciate is dead.

I won't go into all the reasons why grief and Valentine's Day don't mix well; if the day is hard for you, you already have an idea why. What I thought we could do

is discuss a few options for making it through the day.

### 1. Take the day to be completely miserable.

It's okay to be miserable once in a while. This is one day when you're not alone in your misery; a lot of people hate Valentine's Day.

### 2. Ignore the day altogether.

Ignore the obnoxious jewelry commercials, ignore the cards, ignore the chocolates, ignore the girl sitting next to you at the doctor's office chatting on her cell phone about which pair of heels she's going to wear with her red hot mini dress for her 7:30 reservations at...you know what? Just stay home...stay home and don't turn on the TV.

I can sense you're beginning to lose confidence in my suggestions. It may not be realistic to pretend the day doesn't exist and you don't *really* want to spend the day feeling miserable. So let me offer one more suggestion.

### 3. Reframe how you think about the day.

Typically, when we think of Valentine's Day we think of romance, that's why the day is stereotypically hard on people who don't have a "date". But look deeper and we see at the heart of the day is 'love' (pun completely intended). Valentine's Day *ought* to be about giving and receiving love of ALL kinds.

I can hear some of your starting to groan. Stop that, it's not as cheesy as it sounds and you can embrace Valentine's Day in all sort of ways, big and small.

#### Friend and Family Love: Big Steps

- *Invite a group of people over for a casual get together or dinner party.*
- *Plan a night out with others who have experienced the same loss. Acknowledge the day is hard but make it your goal to have fun and laugh. Go to the movies and see a comedy, have a game night, bowl, go to a comedy club, sing karaoke.*

- *Allow your children to pick an activity. Let them dream as big as your budget will allow. Grieving children need opportunities to have good normal fun and seeing them smile will warm your heart a bit. Don't be afraid to acknowledge that being together as a family highlight who is missing and take every chance you get to remember and talk about your loved one, even if it's just to say "Dad would have loved this".*

#### Small Steps

- *Let someone close to you know you are feeling down but don't want to be alone. Invite them over for a quiet night in.*
- *Have a movie night with your kids. Choose feel good movies like comedies, animation, or cheesy old classics. Order pizza and put on your PJ's.*
- *Send a card or flowers to a friend or family member who you know is also feeling down on Valentine's Day. Perhaps they are grieving the same loss you are, or they have experienced some other hardship. Let them know they are not alone.*

#### Stranger Love: (easy tiger) Big Steps

- *Volunteering your time with an organization or charity is an excellent way to interact and connect with people while also helping others. Consider choosing an organization your loved one would have supported and tell yourself you're doing it in his/her honor.*
- *Attend or join a group of any kind. I'm leaving this broad for a reason. Support groups are an excellent way to receive and give support, but there is also benefit in joining any group that gathers around something you like. Camera clubs, choirs, prayer groups, widow/widower happy hours, you name it; they all allow for the benefit of human interaction and recreation.*
- *Set out to do 5 acts of kindness throughout the day. Big or small, they will put more love into the world and will have the added*

*consequence of letting you feel good about yourself.*

#### Small Steps

- *Write a letter. Write to anyone. Write to an organization or professional you think is doing a good job. Write to an individual you know who is struggling. Write to a child or adolescent you want to encourage. Write to your deceased loved one.*
- *Make a monetary donation. Make it in honor of your loved one for the amount you might have spent on dinner and a movie.*
- *Set out to do 1 act of kindness during the day.*

#### Animal Love:

##### Big Steps

- *Spend the day volunteering at an animal rescue or SPCA. Don't underestimate how good puppy love can make you feel.*
- *If you've been feeling lonely, consider fostering or adopting a pet. Consider...carefully. Don't rush into bringing an animal into your home until you're sure you're ready.*

##### Small Steps

- *Spoil your pet. Spend the day with your dog at a dog park or snuggle up with your cat on the couch.*
- *Make a monetary donation to a charity benefiting animals. These programs bring love to suffering individuals in hospitals, hospices, and beyond.*

#### Love for Yourself:

##### All Kind of Steps

- *Recognize your limitations. Don't push yourself into an activity you're not up to.*
- *Treat yourself. Taking budget into consideration, take yourself out for a day of relaxation – whatever that means to you. It may be a spa treatment, retail therapy, or a monster truck rally; as long as it relieves stress or makes you smile, anything goes.*
- *Deliberately set aside time to engage in any activity that helps you cope with grief – exercise, yoga, journaling, art, etc.*
- *Allow yourself to be present with your loved one's memory and*

*allow yourself to cry for as long as you like. We all have our rituals and reminders that bring us close to our loved ones, go ahead and engage in them.*

- *Believe that next year will be a little bit easier.*

## February

In February we celebrate the birth of George Washington and Abe Lincoln. Lent begins. We wonder if the groundhog will see his shadow, and we have Valentine's Day. Candy, flowers and cards are often exchanged. Many cards are given and received between parents and children as a way of showing love for one another. Valentine's Day is another holiday on which bereaved parents remember the drawings, cards and gifts received from their deceased children.

Take time out to be good to yourself. Perhaps you could remember your child with a special flower or could do something kind in your child's memory for someone in need. Most of all, take time to tell your living children and your spouse or someone special how fortunate you are to have them and how much they mean to you.

Lorraine Bauman  
TCF Fairmont, MN

*These days are the  
Winter of the soul.  
But spring comes  
and brings new life and beauty,  
because of the growth...  
of roots in the dark.  
--Iris Bolton, Atlanta, GA*

### You Can See the Stars

Often it is easiest to see the stars in the long, cold nights of winter. People who have come through any kind of life threatening event—a crash, a tornado, a severe illness, the loss of a loved one—speak of how it

has changed their perspective, how it's easier to see what's important.

Several years after our daughter died, we experienced a burglary. All of our wedding silver was stolen, as well as antique pieces that had been handed down through many generations. Of course we were upset. But right away the words came to me: "It's only things." I have no way of knowing whether or not I'd have been this calm if the theft occurred before her death, but I suspect not.

The stars are not only clearer, but more beautiful. Ancient navigators found their way through the seas by looking at the stars. So maybe the experience of loss not only helps clarify what is important to us, but also helps us know where we are and the direction in which we want to go. --Charles Beard

### A Solitary Journey

Grief is a solitary journey. No one but you know the gaping hole left in your life when someone you love has died. And no one but you can mourn the silence that was once filled with laughter and song. It is the nature of love and of death to touch every person in a totally unique way.

Comfort comes from knowing that others have made the same journey. And solace comes from understanding how others have learned to sing again.

--Helen Steiner Rice

### Can You Remember

With winter's tumbling snow  
the roses silent  
and the water ice...  
With trees so barren  
that your mind refuses  
to picture leaves  
and green and even blossoms...

Can you remember,  
can you feel again,  
that spring did come  
from winter every year?

--Sascha Wagner

### A Fitting Tribute

Came the darkness of new winter  
We huddled together in frozen  
disbelief  
Lowering your precious vessel  
into cold unfeeling earth.  
No bird sang nor shone the sun to

cast  
mocking shadows on our despair.  
A light went out in the world that  
day,  
leaving us to shiver  
in the blackness of your absence.  
Four seasons of our sadness have  
passed since that bleak day.  
And now we return to put cold stone  
above your head.  
It does not seem a fitting monument  
for a man of joy.  
Too many tears have been shed,  
I can weep no more.  
Others may not believe,  
but every day your spirit comforts  
me.  
Your voice still speaks within my  
heart.  
And while I may long for the warmth  
of your hands on my shoulders,  
I can feel your workings in God's  
plan.

I believe ...that no loss is forever.  
Today I come to bury my grief.  
Tomorrow, may we rejoice  
that you have lived and loved us,  
erecting a monument of joy  
in life's celebration,  
singing a eulogy of love  
for the brokenhearted,  
lighting an eternal flame of hope  
for those in despair.  
In your loving memory  
let us seek to perfect the world,  
and in so doing, perfect ourselves.  
I believe with perfect faith  
that you are forever. Your body may  
lie

in this sorrowful ground,  
but your spirit soars with eagles,  
still rages at injustice,  
reaches out in loving kindness,  
dances with the ecstasy of life  
that never ends  
And laughs deep in the belly  
to cleanse us of our mortal sadness.  
--Judy Gradford, Rochester NY TCF

### Like a Tree in Winter

Like a tree in winter which  
has lost its leaves, we look ahead  
to spring for new growth and the  
warmth of the sun to heal the pain  
in our hearts.

Let us make February a time to  
reach out to each other and give that  
warmth from our hearts, and in  
return, we will find new growth.

--Pat Dodge, TCF,  
Sacramento Valley CA



## In the Glow of Freshly Fallen Snow

Last night, in the glow of  
freshly fallen snow,  
I felt for the first time in months  
a sense of peace.  
A feeling of wonder overcame me  
and I looked around to see  
if you were there.  
Later, I thought to myself—  
Why did I need to look?  
I know, as surely as I know  
how to breathe,  
that you are with me always.  
You are closer to me now  
than ever before  
and the only difference is that,  
instead of opening my eyes to see  
you,  
now I must open my heart.

--Sandy Goodman, "Love Never  
Dies"



## It's So Cold

It's so cold.  
I went to the cemetery today.  
50 below wind chill.  
After two and a half years  
I thought I was more used to this,  
But I wasn't as "healed" as I thought.  
Your little place in the cemetery  
So alone...So cold  
I wanted to stretch out on your grave,  
Cover you with my body,  
Protect you from the cold.  
I could almost imagine  
what your voice would sound like,  
"I'm so cold, mama."  
Nothing I can do to protect you.  
Helpless, hopeless, despair.  
Logically, I tell myself this is  
foolish,  
you feel no cold.  
Motherly, I ache to protect you.  
It's so cold today.  
I'm sorry Catie, I'm sorry.

--Mary VanBockern, TCF, Sioux Falls

## On Your Birthday

I wrote this date  
this morning, paused,  
And felt the room grow cold;  
it always does  
When I remember all of it—  
Down to the last petal  
tossed by winds  
Above the upturned earth.  
This time the chill does not leave so  
easily.  
It would have been your birthday.  
Soon, I shall be as old as you will  
ever be.

--Sibling Wanda M. Trawick, Acme, PA

## Love Never Goes Away

"Why does it hurt so much?  
Why is this grief so incapacitating?  
If only the hurt weren't so crushing."  
Sounds familiar? All of us have  
known hurts before, but none of our  
previous "ouches" can compare with  
the hurt we feel. Nothing can touch  
the pain of burying a child.

Yet most of us have discovered  
that the sun still comes up. We still  
have to function. We did not die  
when our child died, even though we  
wish we could have, so...we are  
stuck with this pain, this grief. What  
do we do with it? Surely we can't  
live like THIS forever! There are no  
magic formulas for surviving grief.  
There are a few recognized patterns  
for grief, but even those are only  
guidelines. What we do know is that  
the emptiness will never go away. It  
will become tolerable and  
livable...someday.

TIME...the longest word in our  
grief. We used to measure TIME by  
the steps of our child ...the first  
word, first tooth, first date, first  
car....Now we don't have that  
measure anymore. All we have is  
TIME, and it only seems to make the  
hurt worse. So, what do we do? Give  
ourselves TIME...to hurt, to grieve,  
to cry. TIME to choke, to scream.  
TIME to be "crazy," TIME to  
remember.

Be nice to yourself! Don't  
measure your progress through grief  
against anyone else's. Be your own  
timekeeper. Don't push. Eventually,  
you will find the hours and days of  
grief have turned to minutes and then  
moments...but don't expect them to

go away. You will always hurt. You  
don't get over grief...it only  
becomes tolerable and livable.

Change your focus a bit. Instead  
of dwelling on how much you lost,  
try thinking of how much you had.  
Try letting good memories come  
over you as easily as the awful ones  
do. We didn't lose our  
child...HE/SHE DIED. We don't  
lose the love that flowed between  
us...it still flows, but differently  
now.

Does it help to know that if we  
didn't love so very much, it would  
not hurt so badly? Grief is the price  
we pay for love. And as much as it  
hurts, I'm very glad I loved. Don't  
let death cast ugly shadows, but  
rather warm memories of the loving  
times you shared. Even though death  
comes, LOVE NEVER GOES AWAY

--Darcie D. Sims

TIME does not touch  
the firmament of stars  
with a simplicity  
of days and nights and years.  
The rhythm of this smallness  
we call earth  
is only a whisper among galaxies?  
Beyond the measured years which  
rise and fall beyond the calendars  
of human time and place,  
the meaning of this smallness  
we call life will find us  
somewhere in eternity.

"For You From Sascha" by Sascha  
Wagner

## Sorrow

It hurts deep down inside.  
One feels diminished,  
less than we have been.  
Empty, bereft –  
forlorn and incomplete.  
Sorrow is a painful word,  
but if someone is there  
to share the feeling,  
it becomes endurable  
and in the scheme of things  
a time of being  
that includes great emotion  
and thus a time of closeness,  
growing and becoming someone  
more than we have been before.

--Shirley Holzer Jeffrey, "Louie"  
chptr,  
in Death: The Final Stage of Growth  
by Elisabeth Kubler Ross

## Healing...Unobserved

I used to wonder why I always felt like crying when leaving a support group. Then one night I left and it felt as though a great load had been lifted from my inner being. For the first time in several years my surroundings came alive. I observed the twinkling of stars and brightness of the moon. I heard the crunching of snow beneath my boots and paused to watch a rabbit darting to and fro in the twilight. Is this the beginning of healing or has it been there—slowly and desperately with great persistence—trying to emerge from beneath the greatest of sorrows and pain? Maybe tomorrow...I will make a snow angel!

*--Nancy A Gleim, "From the Heart of Samantha"*

### A Dozen Roses

If I had a dozen roses, I know just what I'd do—

I'd give each one a name that reminded me of you.

The first rose I'd name sunshine, 'cause you brighten every day.

The second would be beauty, the kind that never goes away.

The third one would be priceless, like those hugs you gave to me.

I'd name the fourth rose silly—oh how funny you could be.

Rose five of course is patience, something you have helped me find.

The sixth rose I'd call memories, precious gifts you left behind.

The seventh and eighth roses would be faith and grace.

Nine would be unique, because no one can take your place.

The tenth rose, well that's easy, I'd simply name it love.

Eleven I'd call angel; I know you watch from above.

I'd think about the twelfth rose and really take my time—

After all, these roses are for you, my Valentine.

I'm sending them to heaven in every color that I know,

So number twelve I'll name forever; that's how long I'll love you so.

*--Alan Pedersen*

## There's a Valentine Waiting for You

There's a Valentine waiting for you that's different from all the others. It's there every month at our meetings of heartbroken fathers and mothers. Its envelope is made of caring; the glue of understanding seals it tight.

This non-judgmental group who've been there, help to take away your fear and fright.

So come join with us together, read your living message printed clear in not only this month's Valentine, but all those throughout the year.

*--Mary Cleckley*

### Some Quiet Valentines

While watching an evening sunset fade in the western skies, we know that when tomorrow dawns,

from the east the sun will rise.

Although it may be hidden by veils hanging low, we're sure it will appear again and we'll feel its warming glow.

And so it is with life, when seen through misty eyes, when our world is suddenly dimmed and we plead and ask those why's.

It is then we learn, "no one is an island,"

as someone wisely said, as we travel life's uncharted course and by an unknown hand seem led.

We walk that path of sorrow, enduring life's great loss, but by some chance or fate someone's

path we are guided to cross. That someone through kindness in his or her way does impart a warmth and a tenderness that so lift a sad heart.

For it's the depth of their smile that lifts this sorrow of mine, and by far they are best suited to be our Valentine.

We may be someone's Valentine and never be aware,

in these caring, still grieving hearts, our children's love is there.

We've no choice but to continue on life's uncharted way, and be thankful for those quiet friends who brighten up each day.

*--from the*

*Cleveland, OH, TCF newsletter*

### LOVE GIFTS:

A special thank you for the love gift from Kathy Wilcox in memory of Jeff.

**Please help us help others. Make a LOVE GIFT today. Tax deductible Love Gifts may be sent to: TCF C/O Theresa Phillips 6200 Kentucky Ave, Raytown, MO 64133**

**Remember when you came to your first meeting, and someone was there who was a little farther down the road and gave you a hug or shared something that made you feel like you are not crazy. Well, if you are a little bit farther down the road, please feel free to come back to our meetings and help families that are just starting their grief journey.**

*Please visit our website at*

[www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org](http://www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org)

*Find us on Facebook at*

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1582699755290182>

*We have several volunteers who write remembrance cards to families on birthdays and death dates. Just a reminder if you have an address change, please email*

[phillipsplace@aol.com](mailto:phillipsplace@aol.com) or mail a note to TCF, C/O Theresa Phillips 6200 Kentucky Raytown, MO 64133 so the roster can be updated.

*Please remember that you can give to The Compassionate Friends through your United Way pledge at work or as a single gift, but you MUST WRITE IT IN.*