



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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So You Think You're Losing Your Mind Because...

... You find yourself reading the obituaries since your child died—searching for names and ages of others who have died too young?

Well, if this is a sign you are losing your mind, you have lots of company. Some are drawn to the obituaries. Is it because we seek to know that we are not alone in this seemingly endless maze, that there are others out there who know the horror of losing one of their children, and we need to identify with them? Not everybody has this need—but many do. It may be bothersome to your spouse because he or she may feel it is a sign of abnormal grief and is morbid. It isn't for some. You may do it for a time, but eventually most people stop having the need. Don't worry about it.

...Because you have a bad time with the time of day and the day of the week on which your child died?

There again, in the beginning you may find this a problem. It may seem that if you can stop that particular time of day or that day of the week from coming, you will be able to stop the death from having happened. We fail—but it doesn't stop us from having a go at it the next week. This, too, will eventually stop bothering most people, and one day you will realize that particular day and time have come and gone and you have made no note of it. You may find it hastens the process if you make an effort to do something that day that keeps your mind occupied and that changes the scenery—maybe nothing more than a window-shopping trip to the nearest mall.

...Because you find yourself going over and over in your mind what you imagine your child felt or thought as he or she faced death?

This seems to be a particularly bad problem for those whose children died accidentally or as a result of suicide or

murder. You may feel it almost a compulsion at times to try to imagine the thoughts and feelings your child may have had. It really is a universal problem, and you may have more trouble putting this one aside. You will, as a rule, get better about it, and later on it will not occupy your thoughts as much as in the beginning. It is normal. Some find it helpful to find out from anyone connected, or who may have witnessed the death, as much information as possible. Others have no desire to know the details. It is an old story—but we all do it differently, and the way that fills your needs is right for you. Just know that it is normal to have it on your mind.

...Because you find yourself thinking that it would be easier to join your child in death than to go through the pain of living without him or her?

The telephone friends hear this from lots of bereaved parents. They get so tired of the hurt. It frightens the parents to think they are entertaining suicidal thoughts, but it must be a normal reaction for some to consider this an alternative. Many parents, as they talk, are quick to agree that they would not actually consider this as an answer. There are people who love and need them. They realize they could not purposefully put someone they love through the very hell they are seeking to escape. They are able to realize that it is not an answer. (Should you have these thoughts and are not able to put them aside, you would be wise to seek professional help.)

...Because you keep seeing someone who reminds you of your child?

Well, many of us do—you may even find yourself following along behind—just to make sure! The impulse may be to take that person home with you. It may be all a part of the denial process, but I suspect it is just because we miss our child so much.

--Mary Cleckley, Atlanta, GA

Letting Go of the Pain

A few weeks or a few months after your child has died, you'll probably find yourself in a situation where you find yourself laughing or having a good time ...then you may STOP laughing or having a good time and think to yourself, "How can I dare laugh or have any fun, now that my child has died and I hurt so bad?" We've all had this feeling in the early stages of our grief. I urge you newly bereaved, PLEASE don't feel guilty about enjoying the happiness that comes from "LIFE." When you find yourself laughing and enjoying something in life, it doesn't mean that you have forgotten your dead child. It just means that you are "letting go" of some of the pain. All of our lives there will be tears and all of our lives there should be laughter.

When people used to say to me, "you must put it behind you and 'let go of your child' and start living again," I wondered what they meant by "IT." I would get very angry. How dare those people think that I could ever "let go" of my child, or even want to. But after a while I realized I don't have to "let go" of my child in order to live again. I just have to "let go of the pain" that his death caused. His LIFE will always be part of me, and so will his death; I'll never forget him. But I don't have to keep the grief and pain with me always. So if you see me cry, I'm "letting go" of some pain. And when you see me laughing or having a good time, I'm living life again.

--Verna Smith, TCF, Fort Worth, TX

"Grief is a process.

Recovering is a choice.

Grief is the price we pay for love.

*But you don't have to go on paying
the price forever."*

--Rabbi Earl Grollman

A List of Grief Lessons

There's a saying on posters, note cards and plaques that says, "All I need to know about life I learned in kindergarten (or from my dog, etc.). I was thinking that all of us could probably write quite a long list if the title began:

All I need to know about life I learned from grief.

There are some things I have on that list:

- Grieving people want to hear the name of their special someone mentioned—not just for the first few weeks or months—for a lifetime! Before Greg died, I never would have guessed that.
- If you need a listener when you have things all bottled up inside, you have to ask someone to help. If you wait for friends to volunteer to listen, you may be waiting a long time. But if you do happen to be blessed with a great listener without ever having to ask, give them an extra hug for me! They are indeed special!
- Grief temporarily robs your brain of the ability to think clearly or concentrate on reading or paying attention to other people's conversations. It makes you feel like you're becoming senile—even when you're young. What a relief it is when someone tells us it's that way for everybody and you really aren't crazy.
- Don't go out in public without a Kleenex or handkerchief, because when you least expect it, grief is going to pop up and make you cry—it's almost a guarantee!
- Whenever you accomplish any big chore on your own (learning to drive, changing the storm windows, carrying in wood for the fireplace, baking one of his favorite recipes, etc.) you want the brass band to play! Only fellow survivors are able to appreciate the incredible effort even something small took.
- If you find yourself going over and over things, then get up, change your position or the room you're in or the desk where you're sitting. Physically move somewhere else for a little while to give your mind a change of pace.
- Whatever you do and whatever route you take in handling grief, someone, somewhere, sometime is going to tell you it wasn't right. It wasn't enough. It was too soon, too late, not deep enough, too obvious.
- The best saying I have found since Greg's death is: Sometimes the Lord calms the storm; sometimes He let's the storm rage...and calms His child. I feel fortunate to be one of God's children and am honored to say that as my storm did rage, God did calm me.

You are going to survive, even when you don't want to, and someday you will be amazed and even proud of that fact!

Before Greg died, I would have voted to commit someone who had this kind of rocky thinking to the "Home for the Bewildered," but now I realize it is really true.

You will never get over this loss of someone so special, but you will get used to it. At first I thought that sounded so cruel, but then I realized that I didn't want to get over Greg's

death if that meant I would have to forget him or how much it hurt to lose him. I am glad to now be able to say that I am used to him being gone because I can breathe normally, function in the real world and still, at any given moment, instantly transport my thought back to him, his life, our lives together and how much he is missed. In the process of remembering, I am not so overwhelmed as I once was. Whew! The best part is that Greg would agree that this is really okay.

—Carlene Vester Eneroth, in *Bereavement Magazine*,
5125 N Union Blvd, Ste 4, Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Experts in understanding human emotions have been working with people who are mourning for someone they love. What they have found is that families who try to run away from the feeling suffer longer and often never recover from their grief.

Families who face the loss and all the feelings that go with it, who learn to accept all normal stages of grief human beings seem to need to go through, become stronger and are able to begin to go on growing and living full and satisfying lives.

—Edna LeShan, from *Learning to Say Goodbye*

Do It Your Way

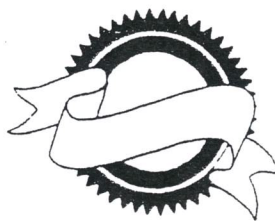
I think it's only fair to tell you—there is no Bereaved Parent of the Month award, nor an award for the one with the stiffest upper lip. In fact, what you will find is that, if you try to be the most stoic, brave & strong, the one doing too well, you suffer the consequences instead of receiving a reward.

It is not possible to lose someone as vital as one's child and not have the pain of deep grief. You will find a great many non-bereaved people will encourage you to play the old, "if you'll pretend you're okay and it's not really so bad, we'll let you come play with us, but if you're going to cry and talk about your dead child, then you can't play" game.

This is one time in your life you don't have to meet anybody else's standards. There is nothing more unique about you than the way you express your grief; you have that right, however it is manifested. A great deal of how you go about it is determined by how you've handled previous problems.

So, if someone tries to influence you to play the old game by rewarding you with attention because "you're doing so well," tell them you're not doing well, that your child has died and you're hurting. Let them know it doesn't help you for them to pretend everything is okay. Do whatever it is you need to do to survive this trauma and don't worry about whether it pleases or displeases other people....DO IT YOUR WAY!!

—Mary Cleckley, Atlanta, GA



A Time to Grieve...a Time to Heal

Have you ever noticed the many mixed-up, confusing emotions involved in grieving?
 On the one hand, you feel restless.
 On the other hand, you feel like you don't want to move at all.
 You feel desperately alone, and yet, you don't want anyone around.
 You feel scatter-brained, forgetful, and yet, frantically meticulous.
 You feel like crying at nothing and sometimes laughing at anything.
 Or do I have that backwards?
 Being in a crowd of people is fine as long as they don't talk to you.
 And yet if they don't talk to you, you feel as if nobody cares.
 You want so desperately for someone to mention your child, to remember the life that once was.
 And yet it can make you furious if ALL they want to talk about is the dead one, and never even mention the living ones.

Grief settles over you like a hot blanket.
 You're as cold as winter snow.
 Grief presses on you like a steam roller.
 You're floating in a bubble above yourself.
 Grief boxes you in on four sides and introduces you to pain no one should have to know.
 But then, once again, you begin to feel compassion.
 You relate to other parents who have had an experience similar to your own.
 And eventually, with a light as sharp as a sunburst, you hear yourself saying your child's name with an unfamiliar smile on your face.
 You remember some of the funny times, and feel laughter building in your throat.

One morning you notice the sun is shining, the flowers are bursting with the colors of spring.
 Three seasons have passed unnoticed... and somehow, you are still here.
 Even though your child is still There.
 You feel your heart swell with a love you never even knew could exist.
 And you find a place in your life for something called, Dare I say, Peace...?

And then, ever so gently, the memories enfold you in a warmth as soothing as a cool shower on a hot summer day, so you find you want to remember.
 And tender memories of love lift you to unreachable heights, to the brightest of stars, to the loveliest touch of Your child.

--Dana Gensler, TCF, South Central KY

Sound Familiar?

I seem to be falling apart.
 My attention span can be measured in seconds, my patience in minutes, and I cry at the drop of a hat.
 I forget things constantly, the morning toast burns daily.
 I forget to sign my checks.
 Half of everything in the house is misplaced.
 Anxiety and restlessness are my constant companions.
 Rainy days seem extra dreary.
 Sunny days seem an outrage.
 Other people's pain and frustration seem insignificant.
 Laughing, happy people seem out of place in my world.

I am normal, I am told.
 I am a newly grieving person.

--Eloise Cole, Phoenix, AZ



Spirals

A child is dead.
 Still meetings meet
 and people eat.
 How dare they?

A child is dead.
 To and fro people go,
 Do they not know?
 How dare they?

A child is dead.
 There are no spares,
 Yet no one cares.
 How dare they?

A child is dead.
 Wedding bells ring,
 The birds still sing.
 How dare they?

A child is dead.
 The flowers bloom,
 They feel no gloom.
 How dare they?

A child is dead.
 The sun's in the sky,
 Clouds float by.
 How dare they?

A child is dead.
 Another sigh, another tear.
 Gone by another year!
 How dare they?

--By Dorothy Walker,
 in memory of Barbara

Healing Does Happen

Parents sometimes ask, "Does it ever get any better?" From my own experience and that of many parents to whom I've talked, I can truthfully say, "Yes, it does." However, it takes time, and it takes work.

When our daughter died, the pain was almost physical at first. I thought of her all day, every day. I found that what helped me most was keeping busy, not trying to take in the finality of it all at once, receiving the support of friends, family and church, and my believing that our daughter was now with God. I tried to concentrate, as time progressed, not on what I had lost, but on what she had gained.

I felt in my grief that it was a choice of being over-controlled or out of control, so I decided to choose the former. From my present perspective, I think over-control was a mistake. Our family, I think, would have worked through our grief in a better

way had we been more open with each other about the grief we felt. I think many of the problems we faced after our daughter died were really due to our grief, which was unrecognized and unresolved because it was unexpressed.

It was compounded by the earlier grief of our infant son, who was born prematurely, and for whom we had not been encouraged to grieve fully.

At that time, 14 years ago, we were not aware of any guidelines for the grieving parent. It was difficult to find the sense of direction which some excellent books of grief now offer. I have learned more about grief and the grieving process in the almost three years of involvement with The Compassionate Friends than I had in the previous eleven years. Slowly, however, we did begin to heal. Memories, even happy ones, at first were only painful; now they began to bring some smiles. From sorrow and regret, we moved to acceptance.

Life is different—we are not the same people, but we are happy again.

We have been fortunate in the birth of our son, who is not a replacement for our other children, but who does help us feel more like a family again. We now are more appreciative of the time we have together, and do things we might earlier have put off until "someday." Of course, we have times when we become irritated or upset with each other; family life often can lead to some friction. But we also realize that minor irritants are not major problems.

The sky we see is no longer the leaden gray of grief and has not been for many years. This is not to say we never have an unhappy moment. Our children have died; we will always regret this and wish it were not so. But now we deal more with the memories of grief, rather than the grief itself. Our sky is blue although there is still, as Father Ken Czillinger expressed it, "a small puff of a cloud which will always remain." Our lives are different now, but happy. My wish for you is that this will soon be true for you as well.

--Barbara Cook, TCF, Birmingham, AL

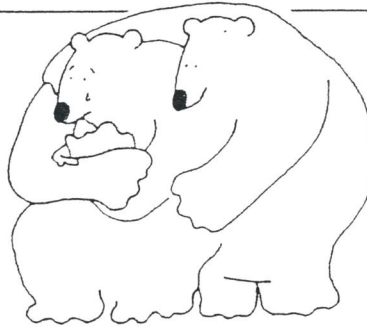
Hugging

Hugging is healthy.
It helps the body's immunity system;
it keeps you healthier,
it cures depression.
It reduces stress, it induces sleep,
it's invigorating, it's rejuvenating.
It has no unpleasant side effects, and
hugging is nothing less than
a miracle drug.
Hugging is all natural.

It is organic, naturally sweet,
no pesticides, no preservatives,
no artificial ingredients
and 100% wholesome.

Hugging is practically perfect.
There are no movable parts,
no batteries to wear out,
no periodic checkups.
Low energy consumption,
high energy consumption,
non-fattening, no monthly payments,
no insurance requirements,
theft proof,
non-taxable, non-polluting,
and, of course, fully returnable.

--From *Parents of Murdered Children*



Little by Little

I once thought that my only link
to you was my grief.

I couldn't let go.

I knew if I did

I would lose us both.

But one day when

I couldn't take the pain anymore,
I decided to try.

So, slowly and carefully

I let go of my deathline to you,
and I was surprised to find myself
being held by God.

Little by little, step by step,

I learned that I didn't need
to hang on to the death
to remember the life.

What a joyous discovery!

--Kittie Brown McGowin
Montgomery, AL, TCF

Things I Learned From You

Things I learned from you...

Never to be judgmental.

To appreciate every sunrise.

To marvel at the loveliness of

butterfly wings. To see

The beauty of every living being.

To appreciate my children.

The song contained in laughter.

To watch the sunset.

To see dinosaurs in the clouds.

The true meaning of sorrow.

To see laughter in the eyes of a child.

To care what happens to others.

To appreciate art.

To love life. To love God.

What it means to have a family.

To protect the earth.

How to accept the life given to me.

The importance of education.

What it means to be a friend.

Not to be afraid.

To pray. To love more.

Not to take anything for granted.

To see beauty wherever I find it.

To be humble. To watch the stars.

That there is an eternity.

Your life was not wasted, little one—

I learned from you.

--Maggie Melendez, Racine, WI, in
Bereavement Magazine 7-8/99.

When Grief Plays Tricks on Us

A mother whose baby was still-born wakes up in the night, believing she hears her baby crying.... A father shopping in a sporting goods store catches a glimpse of a young man going around the corner and, for a moment, thinks it is his son.... A woman feels a quiver in her stomach, thinking her baby is moving, only to remember the miscarriage she had experienced the week before....

Grief is a very normal and natural response to the death of someone we love. Most expect they will be sad, cry & not feel much like being active in living for a short while. But what most parents are unprepared for is the intensity & duration of grief and those irrational and unexpected grief reactions which occur. Not knowing that these responses are common, parents may fear they are "going crazy."

In working with parents over the years, what I have found is that grief reactions can differ greatly between individuals. But there are some reactions which are experienced often, although not always, by parents. I would like to explore these with you, because I believe that knowing one is going through something which others also experience can help one to feel less "out of control," and can help normalize the feelings which seem so "abnormal" to the griever.

In the case of miscarriage, it is relatively common for mothers to have thoughts of still being pregnant. These are usually fleeting, and often occur upon awakening, lying down, or in a quiet moment during the course of a busy day. A mother may feel a "flutter" or "morning sickness." This may be the body adjusting to the post-pregnancy state, a shift in hormonal level as well as physical changes.

A mother whose child died in pregnancy or as an infant or small child may think she is hearing her baby cry. This is a very common response, and one I have heard of from many moms over the years. Nighttime seems to be a particularly susceptible time for this, and it may or may not be accompanied by dreams.

Bereaved parents often have moments of questioning the reality of the death, "Did my child really die, or was there a mix-up at the hospital?" It sounds crazy, but even parents who have seen and spent time with their children after death may experience this as part of the longing and pining that comes with grief. It can be frightening, but most often is very normal.

Questioning the reality of the death is particularly common in parents who have had lack of closure. When circumstances are such that the parents are unable or choose not to view the body, the brain has greater difficulty in processing the reality of the event of death. A mother whose child dies in a fiery crash may come home from work and expect her child to be sitting there, waiting to tell her there was a mistake and she missed the flight.

In most instances, parents know that the deceased is, indeed, dead. In rare cases, proof of the death may be lacking and investigation may be warranted. In cases where proof of death is present and the bereaved continues to question the reality of the death, counseling intervention is necessary. Most often, however, thoughts are fleeting, and the reality is indeed a reality. It is the longing and pining for the deceased that leads the bereaved parent to have these responses. When reality is too painful, we revert back to our childlike selves and experience magical thinking like that of a child. This is very normal and, although it may be disturbing, will subside in the process of grief.

Other common "tricks" of grief include forgetfulness, inability to concentrate, lack of energy, disinterest in life, and depression. While many of these might warrant clinical intervention under ordinary circumstances, they are normal responses during grief. If extreme or prolonged, one should seek professional help.

The reactions to loss are not fun, and one cannot minimize their intensity. It can help, however, to realize you are not alone in them, and they will not last forever.

--Debra Brock, *Raindrops Founder*

Welcome Newcomer

Beneath the laughter and the smiles
echoes the anguish of children gone.
Don't be misled by the superficial joy.
Our normal appearance
belies our eternal grief.

We rush to meetings
to share details of death.
In better days we would have
changed the channel
to avoid these stories of horror.
Priorities change.

Newcomers enter, confused and angry.
They wonder whether
these laughing parents
have truly lost their minds.
(They do not yet realize we do this so
as NOT to lose our minds.)

Balloons of all colors decorate the room.
"Are we at a birthday party?"
Many are busy writing messages
with their hearts.
Soon the balloons will rise to the heavens,
symbolically touching
our precious loves.

We know well this anger and confusion.
We remember believing we would
never laugh again.
Now, with newfound wisdom,
we know it is possible and necessary
to be able to laugh and cry
through tears of grief.
Someday you will know this too.
--Moe Beres, *TCF Babylon*

I Just Lost You

How can I put your dying into words?
Are there words powerful enough
to describe the death of you,
and this lost, pain-filled me?

Where do all these tears come from?
Endlessly, they flow from my hurting eyes.
I wish they could drown out
the awfulness of being in a life
I don't recognize anymore.

Who am I now, without you?
I feel I've lost myself in a fog.
A mother without her child—
That's not supposed to be.

What will happen to me now?
A mother can't stop being a mother.
I know I shall go on loving you,
Your life has not ended for me.
--Monica Eblen, *South Bend, Indiana*
in Bereavement Magazine

"Let no one say this tragic death is the will of God."

Tony Cartledge is pastor of Woodhaven Baptist Church in Apex, NC. As he was driving his seven-year-old daughter, Bethany, home from time spent with her grandparents, they were involved in a terrible wreck with a car driven by a drunk driver. Tony was injured and could not attend his daughter's funeral. In the Intensive Care Unit of a South Carolina hospital, he wrote the following to be read at Bethany's service:

"It is important for me to say this to you—thank you for allowing me to do so. Let no one say this tragic death is the will of God, under any circumstances. Let no one think for a minute this child's heavenly parent needed her more than her earthly parents, or that the angelic choir needed her sweet voice more than our own children's choir needed her.

"Bethany's death is not the result of God's divine or beneficent choice. Rather, it comes as the end result of cumulative bad choices made by a man who was also created as a child of God. He didn't set out to kill our daughter, but it was his behavior—and not God's—that brings us to this place.

"I do not ask why this happened, nor do I ever expect to look back and understand some hidden purpose of God in Bethany's death. There is no "why" to this tragedy—there is only a "what"—the hard reality that my precious little daughter is gone from this earth.

"I have no fear for her future—Bethany's faith was as pure as the snow she longed for, and God's promises are as sure as the rising sun. Now she plays with her Grandfather Rush and Grandpa Tilley, and we are left with only her toys & the indelible memories of a childhood bright with promise and filled with love. Bethany will always live in our hearts, and God—and you—will see us through this grievous time. We will never be the same again, but we will be what we can be. Try to be patient with us as we heal, for it may take a lifetime. Be prayerful for us, but most of all, be careful what choices you make—choose good, not evil."

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos, and with muffled drum,
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message
He is dead!*

*Put crepe bows around the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves,
He was my North, my South, my East and West
My working week and my Sunday rest
My noon, my midnight, my talk and my song;
I thought that love would last forever; I was wrong.
The stars are not wanted now, put out every one,
Pack up the moon, and dismantle the sun,
Pour away the ocean, and sweep up the woods,
For nothing now can ever come to any good.*

--From Another Time by W. H. Auden, published 1941.

Come Walk Among the Stars

*For years I never knew whether the twilight
was the ending of the day
or the beginning of the night
and then suddenly one day,
I understood that this did not matter at all
for time is but a circle, and so there can be
no beginning and no ending,
and this is how I came to know...
that birth and death are one,
and it is neither the coming or the going
that is of consequence,
What is of consequence is the beauty
that one gathers in this
interlude called...*

Life.

--Winston Abbot

Grief Follows No Schedule

Society has a tendency to limit the time of mourning that is considered acceptable. That time may be three days, three weeks, or three months. But sooner or later the grieving person gets the message that it's time to stop grieving and start living. People become uncomfortable with the grieving person. They grow weary of hearing of the pain over & over. This is natural. People not in grief do not want to be reminded of death; they want to get back to their everyday lives and happier thoughts. The grieving person, however, needs to tell their story over and over. There is no time table for grief. Each person grieves in his or her own way and takes the time needed to resolve the grief.

What, then, is the grief process? Grief counselors state that raw grief (uncontrolled sobbing at least once a day) may last for months. This is the time of overwhelming emotions. The grieving person has sleeplessness, loss of appetite or overeating, often physical pain in the stomach or heart area, inability to concentrate, feeling of confusion and numbness.

Later, and the time will vary from person to person, the heaviness of grief will lessen. There will still be difficult days, sometimes for no reason at all, but there will also be "good" days. This is the time of "reinvesting," where the grieving person begins to build a new life. Sadness still continues and there may be occasional crying, but more and more energy is devoted to getting on with living. That shift is one that happens naturally and cannot be forced. The timetable of grief is an individual one, requiring love and much, much patience.

--From The Bear House Chronicles



If Only

"If only" is the whip with which we lash ourselves.
If only I had not bought him a motorcycle...
If only I had not let her cross the street alone...
If only I had forbidden him to drive while he was so tired...
If only I had not permitted the surgery...
If only I had allowed the surgery sooner...
If only I had not waited for the ambulance...
If only I had waited for trained personnel to move her...
If only I were an all-knowing, all-powerful God,
I would not have allowed my child to die.
But I am only human.

--Theresa Hutchison, TCF, Norman, OK

Black Holes

The other day I was reading an article about "black holes" that are located many, many light years out in deep space. Those holes are collapsed stars which suck light into them, let no light out, and consume any matter approaching them.

Strange, but I don't have to go light years away. I have one of those things inside me. It appeared when my daughter died. She was one of my "stars," and that "star" collapsed on that ugly day. My "black hole" sucks light into it also. I never know when it will strike, or just what will cause my day to darken, my eyes to dim with tears, and happiness to be sucked away. Some days, I can circle the abyss, even look down into it with no effect on me. Other times, a note of music, a name, a sight, or even a smell will send me tumbling into that "black hole" which was my star of a daughter. Outer space? No, inner space is where my "black hole" is located.

Do you have a "black hole" too? Maybe we should get together and form the Royal Society of Internal Black Hole Watchers. We've already paid our dues.

--Tom Crouthamel, TCF, Sarasota/Bradenton, FL

You Will

You will live
Although you feel like you are dying.
You will laugh once again
Although you feel that emotion is lost forever.
You will think clearly again
Although you feel very confused most of the time.
You will celebrate your child's life
Although now you are enveloped in the whys
and if onlys of your child's death.
You will somehow make your way through this
rough work called grieving
Although today you feel you are slipping backwards.
You will find love, understanding and caring with
The Compassionate Friends
Although today you are lonely, isolated and withdrawn.
Choose the "You Will."

I did, and it is helping with that large hole in my heart.

--Carol Joyce, TCF, Fort Lauderdale FL

My Secret

Within days of my son's tragic death in a helicopter crash, it became my sad duty to remove his belongings from his apartment. In the numbing fog of shock and denial, I sifted through the contents of every drawer, cabinet & closet. The wrenching decisions of what to do with his clothes, his video tapes—even his toothbrush—made my head swim.

Although I gave many of his things to his roommate, other friends, family and "Goodwill," I kept the "special" things for myself—school yearbooks, pictures, certain items of clothing ...and his collection of crazy T-shirts. I put this strange assortment of things in his foot locker, a remnant of his boarding school days.

What I didn't tell anyone was that I never laundered the T-shirts I found in the dirty clothes hamper. I just folded them and put them in the foot locker with my other memories. And from time to time during those first months of agonizing pain, I sat on the floor and opened the treasured remnants of a life that had been such a large part of mine.

Then I would take the unwashed T-shirts and bury my face in them, inhaling the combined scents of his cologne, deodorant and perspiration, mixed with the wetness of my tears. It made me feel for just a moment that he wasn't really so far away. "What a perverse thing to do," I thought. "I'm sure no one else would ever understand my doing such a thing—surely they'd think I had gone off the deep end." So I never told anyone about this strange behavior—and the odd comfort it gave me.

Months later at a national TCF conference, I heard a speaker tell hundreds of bereaved parents assembled about a mother whose baby had died suddenly and how she refused to wash the soiled shirt the infant was wearing, but found comfort in holding it close to her and smelling it. "My gosh," I thought, "maybe I'm not so crazy after all."

Since this experience I have discovered that this is not as uncommon as I had thought. The scents of a loved one are as much a part of them as the sound of a voice, the touch of a hand or the tenderness of a kiss. There is nothing "perverse" in wanting to cling to those precious memories.

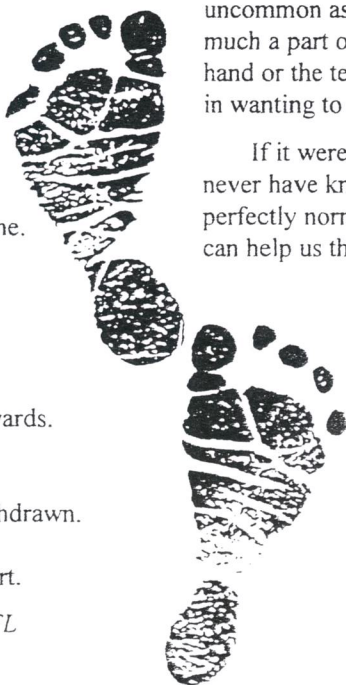
If it were not for The Compassionate Friends, I might never have known that my actions, rather than strange, were perfectly normal. Another example of the many ways TCF can help us through this difficult journey.

--Carol Ragland, TCF, Houston-West, Texas

I Slept Like a Baby

For the first month after my daughter died,
I slept like a baby—
I really did!
Slept a couple of hours, woke up crying,
slept a couple of hours, woke up crying,
slept a couple of hours...:

--Tom Crouthamel, TCF, Sarasota, FL



After the First Year

After the first year
The pain changes from a crushing weight to a wickedly sharp
cutting edge.

Time speeds up from a grinding plodding
To a more normal routine
And sometimes you can forget (for a moment)
That your whole life was destroyed
Just last year.

After the first year
You start to remember the good times,
And you can tell a funny story about your child
And save the crying for later.
But sometimes it seems like
You're the only one left who mourns.
"What's the matter with you, anyway?"
"It's been a whole year."

After the first year
Your child seems a little closer
And yet still so far away.
Miracle of miracles, you haven't forgotten
How he walks, her voice, the shape of his head
Or the solid warmth of her fingers curving around yours.
Those memories ambush you at many unlikely moments
and tear you apart.

After the first year
Your heart begins to thaw.
You remember that you once loved your surviving children
And you love them again.
You remember that life used to hold joy,
And you rediscover some small enjoyment in living.
You learn to piece your life back together
In a different pattern.
After the first year

You pick up your burdens and go on.
Amazingly, you've survived a blow
More painful than anything you ever imagined.
Even though you wished you could have died too,
It slowly dawns on you that you must still live.
Because after the first year,
Comes the second year.

--Liz Ford, in memory of her son Alexander, TCF, Madison, WI

Today I laughed,
a throaty
little giggle,
a tiny laugh
this first time
since you died.↓

Today I laughed,
no hearty chuckle,
a light laugh
this first time
since you died.↗

Today I laughed
a little laugh,
a little laugh
since you left.↓

Today I laughed,
a tinkling laugh,
echoing
from my soul.
It was happy
It is
a beginning...

--Toby Sue Shaw, TCF, Stamford, CT

Different but Good

The other day, a friend who is suffering from a significant loss three months ago, was telling me how her old "friends" have seemed to drop her. One, in fact, told her that her outlook was terrible, she never has an up-beat thing to say, and they were tired of her feeling sorry for herself. How well I remember that same conversation with the leader of my church. He told me I was overly critical, that I whined often, and my behavior was inappropriate for the position I held in my church. He even told me I acted like a person who was well known for her mental problems. I remember telling him that he was upsetting me and making me cry, but it didn't make a difference. You see, I was supposed to be like I was before my daughter's death. Why wasn't I back to my old self? Gosh, it had been 4 months!

Don't people realize that I will never be like I was before? The old self is gone forever, along with my daughter. But now there is **me**. I'm still here, but I'm different and I shall continue to be different. Why should I be any way else?

Tragedy affects us. We have to change in order to accept what has happened to us. If we're lucky, we get through in spite of our "friends." We find new, more meaningful friendships out of the ashes of some of the old. Good friends stick by you even if they don't understand. Around each corner we take in our recovery, there are good people who befriend us. Bless them!

When someone thoughtlessly asks you when you're going to be back to your old self again, you can tell them never. You are different now, and that is the way it is. I'm so thankful that I found people during my ongoing recovery who really care, have time for me, and help me develop a peaceful outlook on my life.

When my time here is finished, I will again see my daughter. Until then the days are good and I have lots and lots of things to do. I'm truly blessed! --Carol Moore, TCF, Central CT

Safe and Unsafe People

There is this analogy concerning "safe" and "unsafe" people. The terms "safe" and "unsafe" were coined by a Compassionate Friend to describe her feelings when in the presence of normal, everyday people—friends, strangers, relatives, or mere acquaintances. To a bereaved parent, these individual people are either "safe" or "unsafe" to be with.

Now for the analogy! A bereaved parent is like a person who has fallen into a deep, cold lake. We struggle to stay up, but realize we are drowning. As we look toward the shore for help, we see people standing and watching. "Unsafe" people will (1) run the other way, (2) stand and watch because they don't know what to do, or (3) stand on shore and begin to explain to you how to swim, step by step.

Then there are the "safe" people... God bless them! They'll jump in the cold, dirty water with all their clothes on and swim out to help. Maybe they have never "been drowning" themselves, but so what! They care enough to put themselves aside and meet you right where you are, even if where you are is very uncomfortable. I'm grateful for the safe people in my life who are still loving me and swimming with me. They are truly "life-savers." As for the "unsafe" people, I have mixed emotions. Sometimes it is anger, sadness, disbelief, loneliness, or any combination of all of them. Do the "unsafe" people not care? Perhaps the answer comes in the form of another question: "How much do they care?" --Darlene Gersch, TCF, Will County, IL

Take the Time ... to Hurt, to Cry ...

Wordless and worldless, endless and forever grief goes on. It takes the best, and leaves the rest an empty shell. Life is Hell.

David was dead four months when I wrote that in my journal. Time was my enemy. As I envisioned the future of my life, I saw only a vast expanse of desert—dry, parched & empty.

It is now a year and a half since David's death, and I recognize that time has become my friend. Now when I look to the future, I see hills and valleys—struggles, to be sure, but also moments spent at the summit. What has happened? Time is healing.

Take the time...

To hurt... The pain is great and the temptation to run away is great. But there is no avoiding, no escaping the hard feelings. If you cover them over, they only re-surface later in a potentially more destructive way.

To cry... It may feel like once started, you can never stop. But you have every reason to cry, and when you have cried enough, you will stop.

To "fall apart"... If you have a broken leg, you would not expect yourself to function at full capacity right away. Your wound is much greater—you have a broken heart. Confusion, inability to concentrate, lethargy, imagined glimpses of your dead child are normal parts of the grieving process and do not mean that you are going crazy.

To be "selfish"... Mourning is an egocentric time, a time for turning inward and for introspection.

To "identify"... and seek out resources in your environment that can help: friends, clergy, Compassionate Friends, a counselor. Talk to them.

Having done all that—having lingered in the valley of the shadow—it is time to begin to climb out.

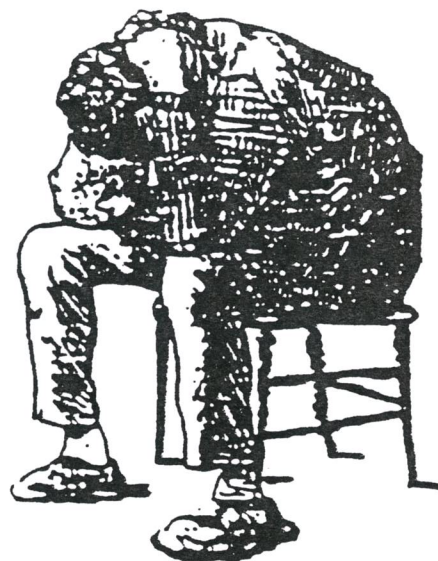
Take the time...

To engage again in activities that were once pleasurable. They may hold no joy the first few times; someday they will, and that will be all right.

To laugh without guilt. Savor the good moments in the day, brief though they may be. Through your child, you can rediscover the beauty of a sunset.

To care for your health. Grieving is physiological as well as psychological stress. Your body needs protection.

To be patient. Wanting to live again and learning to live again take time. The path out the other side of the valley is steep, and we all often stumble. But with time—time spent doing the work of grief—you can find the path to a world made richer by your love. —Broona Romanoff, Ph.D., Albany, NY, TCF



*When a moment of unbearable grief
strangles your heart,
close your eyes and
ask your dead child what to do...*

—Sascha Wagner

Can You Hear the Music?

Can you hear the music?
No, not with your ears—with your heart.
It may be too soon for you.
I remember—I have not forgotten.

Your pain is real. Your sorrow is ever present.
Your days are empty. Your future is uncertain.
There is no music. I remember how it was.

The sobbing of your broken heart and
The screams of your anguished soul
Overshadow the music.
It is still there although you may not hear it now.
I didn't. I remember how it was.

Friend, will you trust me?
You will hear the music again.
But you must want to hear it.
It may not happen for a while.
It may come in subdued tones and single notes at first,
And later more notes, then chords, then measures.
Embrace it, and allow the melody to form.

And some day, my friend, you will look back
And discover that the symphony of life
Has returned to you.

—Lamar Bradley, TCF, Nashville, TN

We need to wait patiently, and the time will come—
and each person will know—when reaching out
to others is the surest way to comfort one's self.
—Sue Catherine Holtkamp, *Grieving with Hope*

There is a discussion in the Talmud, an ancient Jewish writing. The Jews had the custom of rending their garments—literally tearing their clothes—to symbolize the ripping apart that death brings. But the question was raised: After a period of mourning, could you sew the garment up and use it again? The teachers answered YES, but when you mended it, you should not tuck edges under so it would look as if it had never been torn. This symbolized the fact that life after grief is not the same as before. The rent will show. The next question was: Can you sell the garment? The teachers said NO. The rending of our life is ours, and others cannot wear it.

No, we don't get over it. We change and grow. Our life has a difference which is ours alone. As COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS, we can help each other make that difference, the kind that increases the world's supply of compassion, love and healing. --Dennis Klass, TCF, St. Louis, MO

Let's Go Home

Let's go home—
My eyes pleaded to my husband.
We don't belong here.
This is crazy—these people are still hurting.
Two, five years later and they are still coming here.

Let's go home. We don't belong here.
We won't, we can't be like that. Perhaps—
If I don't speak,
If I don't tell them why we came—
It won't be true.

But wait... Why are they laughing?
They all lost children, yet they are laughing
at something, somehow.
And wait... Why am I nodding at what he's saying?
Why do I feel I must say something to that couple
who are in this nightmare even less time than we?

They all seem to know what I'm feeling—
without my even saying it—
Just not flinching at my tears.
That steady, endless stream of tears that seems to never stop.
Perhaps—One day I'll join their laughter—
Let's wait—Perhaps we shouldn't leave just yet.

--Sandy Fein, Manhasset, NY

Turning Point

Dawn does not so much break as it happens
Dark slides into light so slowly my eyes
Adjust without thought, as faint pink ribbons
Turn to streamers of orange in eastern skies.
So goes my grief with no strident fanfare.
Sadness and grieving have been all I know.
Then, for a brief moment, it is not there.
Imperceptibly then the moments grow.
Until I laugh without guilt. Life's more worthwhile,
I don't feel as compelled to visit the grave.
I can remember some good times and I smile.
There was nothing dramatic and I have
Had no revelation, no special thing.
I just felt a bit better sometime last spring.

--Richard A. Dew, *Rachel's Cry*



The Butterfly in Our Lives

In our Compassionate Friends circles, we often hear of the butterfly representing the lives of our children who have died. Their spirit lives on and our memories live on, often in fleeting moments. But I think the butterfly's life cycle—metamorphosis—could just as easily represent our own lives. We seem to fit the four stages.

THE EGG: When we are small, we are protected, changing, and living in a somewhat small and safe world—much like a butterfly egg attached to a leaf somewhere.

THE CATERPILLAR: The caterpillar is much like our lives before the death of our child/children. We go through the day doing what we need to do. We grow a lot and we change slowly. We devour many things in daily life—work, church, Little League. And then the child is gone. We change!

THE COCOON: After the death of our child, we shut ourselves off from so much because of our grief. We often encase ourselves in the blanket of grief and depression because that is what protects us from the horrible pain. We don't want to be a part of life because of all the painful memories. There are reminders out there which cause pain.

THE BUTTERFLY: The pain lessens and we begin to heal as we work through the grief process, and we begin to see a ray of light—a little color. Some of the weight is removed. We break open our cocoon and begin to reach out ever so slightly and touch life again, just to see if it will hurt too much. As we discover the brighter days and brilliant colors of life, we become more like the butterfly. We are free to once again be part of life; we can move about more easily and begin to take some of the nectar from life. --Dale Tallant, TCF, Tulare, CA

How Long Does It Take?

A question that first- and second-year bereaved parents would like answered. Make this condition finite, please!

As long as it takes; that's how long it takes.

It's not about forgetting. It's about hurting.

And I know that if I am alive 20 years from now, and I happen to look at a blue sky with puffy clouds and think of my son Fred, and figure how old he'd be, and what he'd be doing, and what his children would be doing—I'll hurt.

And I know if I can switch my train of thought from what is not, to what was, a happy memory, I'll be able to smile through the tears.

We don't stop hurting, ever. But so many things occur each day, so many events and thoughts and happenings intervene, that our focus is shifted. The death of our child changes from the main concern in our life to one of many.

A life may stop; but the loving goes on. To love deeply is to be vulnerable. For all our days.

--Joan D. Schmidt, Central Jersey TCF

Often-Asked Questions

The following is from the Birmingham, Alabama chapter. For one of their meetings, parents submitted written questions, to which they as a group responded, calling upon their collective experience, feelings and coping skills. These are some of the questions asked and the comments.

What do you say when asked, "How many children do you have?" This is a difficult question for the newly bereaved parents. If we mention only our living children in answering or say "none," we feel as though we have denied our child's existence, and we feel guilty.

One parent responded: Although we may feel guilty at first if we do not mention our dead child, I have found that it creates an uncomfortable situation for the one inquiring (who is usually a casual acquaintance or someone I have just met) if I mention my child who has died. I feel more comfortable mentioning only my living children at first, and should a friendship develop, tell of my dead child at a later time.

Another parent suggested, "My wife and I have had four children" [this includes the one who died]. Seldom does anyone pick up on the "had." I then go on to inquire, "How many do you have?"

Regardless of how you choose to answer, the important thing is to do what seems comfortable to you. Realize that your feelings may change as you progress through your grief, and the way you choose to respond may change as well.

What should I do about my child's belongings? When our child has died, we frequently find it difficult to know what to do about his/her possessions and when to do it. Well-intentioned friends and extended family members urge us to give away or otherwise dispose of them soon after the death.

The most important advice we can give is: Don't be rushed into doing anything before you are ready. If seeing the child's possessions is a source of pain for other immediate family members, you may wish to box them up and put them away until such time as you feel ready to go through them and decide what to keep and what to give away. If there are sur-

viving children, they may wish to choose something belonging to their brother or sister as a special remembrance.

Is it normal to be angry at God? Yes, it is normal. Many of us have been. Often our anger arises from comments made by well-meaning people that our child's death is "God's will" or that he has "taken" our child. Although such beliefs are comforting to some people, they cause others to react with anger. Why would a good and loving God cause us such pain by "taking" our child or by failing to prevent his death?

For reasons we may not be able to understand completely, God allows events to happen which may bring pain and suffering to us. However, God is not the cause of our suffering, but rather grieves with us.

Many of us have found that expressing our anger directly to God, either verbally or through letters, helps to dissipate it. Some people find that a change in perspective helps: rather than viewing God as "taking" our children, we prefer to think that He "receives" them. God does not cause our suffering, but is with us to support and help us through our sorrow if we just ask. If prayer is difficult, some parents have found saying simply, "Lord, have mercy," to be a source of real help.

Will I always feel the way I do now? No. When we are first bereaved, life seems dark & bleak indeed, shadowed by the leaden clouds of grief. Even memories of happy times with our child seem sad. It is true life cannot be the same again. We will always have some pain because we love our child and wish that s/he were with us. Grief is the price we pay for love.

In early grief we think we can never be happy again. But we are wrong. We can rebuild our lives again, and can be happy again, if we choose to do so. Parents who have found their grief softened by time agree that the intensity of the pain we feel in early grief does lessen. It does get easier and we do learn to cope. But it takes time and work.

<i>If you think you are going insane.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If all you can do is cry.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If you have trouble with the most minor decisions.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If you can't taste your food or have any semblance of an appetite.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If you have feelings of rage, denial and depression.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If you find yourself enjoying a funny moment and immediately feel guilty.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If your friends dwindle away and you feel you have the plague.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If your blood boils & the hair in your nose curls when someone tells you "it was God's will".....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If you can't talk about it, but you can smash dishes, shred up old phone books, or kick the garbage can (preferably empty) down the lane.....</i>	<i>that's normal</i>
<i>If you can share your story, your feelings with an understanding listener, another bereaved parent..</i>	<i>that's a beginning</i>
<i>If you can get a glimmer of your child's life rather than of their death.....</i>	<i>that's wonderful</i>
<i>If you can remember your child with a smile.....</i>	<i>that's healing</i>
<i>If you find your mirrors have become windows and you are able to reach out to other bereaved parents</i>	<i>that's growing</i>

—Excerpted from "The Normal Family" by Edith Fraser



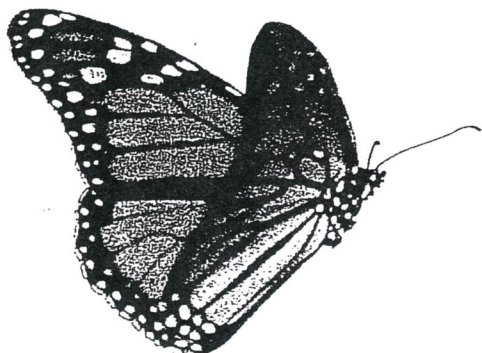
**The
Compassionate
Friends**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

c/o Barbara Starr
508 N.W. Murray, #211
Lee's Summit, MO 64081

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Barbara Starr, Regional Coordinator
816-229-2640, <Barbara.Starr@Live.com>
Local Website: www.easternjacksoncountytcf.org



GROUPS IN/NEAR THE KANSAS CITY METRO AREA

Independence, MO

3rd Thursday 7:30 pm
Walnut Gardens Community of Christ, 19201 RD Mize Rd., Indep.
Theresa Phillips, phillipsplace@aol.com 816-358-2969

Kansas City, MO (Northland) No regular meetings scheduled

North Metro (Liberty)

2nd Thursday 7:00 pm
Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, 1600 N 291 Hwy
Joe & Michele Sanderson, libertymotcf@yahoo.com 816-769-6207

Kansas City, MO (South)

4th Tuesday 7:30 pm
St. Joseph Med. Ctr., 1000 Carondelet, Community Ctr., Abell Lorenz Rm
Matt & Katie Knox, katiejknox@gmail.com 816-365-3300

Olathe, KS

2nd Monday 7:00 pm
Advent Lutheran Church, 11800 W 151st St., Olathe
Gay Kahler & Brian Janes, www.jocotcf.org (913-764-2669)

Wyandotte County, KS

1st Tuesday 7:00 pm
Eisenhower Recreation Center, 2901 N. 72nd St., KCKS
Richard & Marlene Moore, prichardmoore@yahoo.com 913-238-1890

Miami County, KS

No regular meetings scheduled

Darrell Williams (913-755-4026)
Cathy Leaver (913-731-5839)

Lawrence, KS (Douglas County)

2nd Monday 7:00 pm
900 Madeline Lane, Lawrence, KS 66049
dansrokelly@msn.com, Sarah 785-840-5349

Topeka, KS

4th Monday 7:00 pm
Most Pure Heart of Mary Catholic Church, 3601 W. 17th St.
Gary & Susan Chan (785-272-4895)

Additional Grief Support Group: St. Joseph, MO Mourning Star Grief Support Group

1st Wednesday 6:30 pm
Green Valley Baptist Church, 3110 Cook Rd., St. Joseph 64506
Melody Townsend, www.gvchurch.com (church: 816-279-3621)