



The Compassionate Friends

Eastern Jackson County Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

May - June 2026

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Can We Skip This Day? **Tips on Handling Mother's Day,** **Memorial Day, Father's Day**

Survival isn't instinctive anymore. Sometimes, after the death of our child, apathy takes over. Coupled with celebration of motherhood or fatherhood in the absence of our child it can be a slap in the face. Here are some helpful ideas for parents enduring their first, or yet another Mother's Day and Father's Day. *(The Editor is very sorry that you are reading this too late to help with this year's Mother's Day. Set it aside to read again next year.)*

T.E.A.R.S.

T – Take care of yourself! Go the extra mile to make yourself as happy as possible. ♥ Surround yourself with people who make you feel comfortable in your grief. ♥ Exercise is also a great outlet for grief. Sometimes, a hike alone or with your partner is a nice way to spend the day. ♥ Take a bubble bath with your favorite music playing in the background. ♥ If you have other children, dedicate half the day to a Mother's or Father's Day celebration with them and the other half alone or with your partner. ♥ Some parents will find a visit to the cemetery therapeutic. ♥ Cry, cry, cry—tears have a healing effect, and you have definitely earned these tears.

E – Embrace the memories [if you can] by looking at photographs, watching video tapes, sharing poetry or making a special cassette tape of songs which remind you of your child. At first it may seem overwhelming [if it's too much, keep it in mind for next year]; however, many couples say that those times of

sharing bring healing to the family. It is a gentle reminder to the entire family that this child will always be your child.

A – Acknowledge feelings of grief and doubt. You may wonder if you should “celebrate” without your child. It may seem pointless. Give yourself permission to have these feelings and accept them. Prepare for the likelihood that the “day” will be difficult; however, many parents say the days before the actual holiday are much worse than the day itself. If you do have feelings of joy, try not to feel guilty. The grieving process allows room to breathe in between the waves of grief.

R – Routines can be changed! If you typically spend Father's Day with a large family group, but this year it seems awkward or too painful without your child, excuse yourself from the routine and establish new traditions which are more accommodating to your grief. Sometimes, more intimate and personal gatherings make grieving parents feel more comfortable in sharing their honest feelings about the special event and the death of their child. Consider a gathering with other bereaved parents you may have met through a support group.

S – Seek out ways to memorialize your child. Some ideas: ♥ Light a candle at a specific time every year on this special day. ♥ Light luminaries in your yard. ♥ Create a collage or special album of photographs of your child. ♥ Plant a tree or flowers in your child's memory. ♥ Buy something that reminds you of your child. Having a specific theme is helpful, like angels, butterflies, Disney characters, or

other themes. ♥ Reaching out to others on a special day [such as visiting shut-ins or a nursing home, donating time at an animal shelter, or making a donation to TCF, a community pantry, a shelter for battered women and children] honors the memory of your child.

Another suggestion for partners, family members and friends is to make a phone call, or send a note or greeting card on the special day acknowledging the child. This is very important to parents, and it reassures them you have not forgotten—they certainly have not.

--By Joanne Cacciatore, TCF,
Phoenix, AZ,

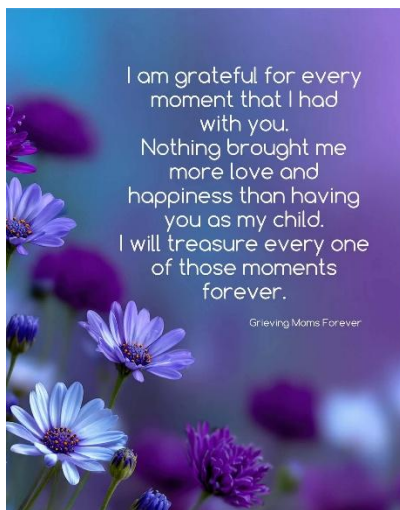


*Grief is not a choice;
it is a transformative experience we are living.
The choice is not whether we will be transformed,
the choice is how much we want to be
a part of shaping that transformation.
Profound loss shakes us to our core and
one hard fought, messy, painful step at a time,
we make the most intense, deep-set,
impossible choices about how, who,
and what our lives will look like now.*

- Andy McNiel, CEO, The Compassionate Friends



compassionatefriends.org



The loneliest part of grief -

isn't always the moment you lose someone.

It's what comes after.

After the funeral. After the cards stop coming. After people go back to their lives.

That's when the silence gets loud.

That's when you realize the world didn't stop, even though yours did.

Over time, I've received thousands of emails from people trying to make sense of that silence.

People who say...

"I think people are tired of hearing about it."

"I don't want to bring it up anymore."

"I feel like I should be doing better by now."

"I just keep it to myself."

And that's where the real loneliness begins. Not because people don't care. But because grief makes you feel like you're too much. Too sad. Too heavy. Too far removed from the life everyone else is living.

So you start to carry it quietly.

You smile when you're supposed to.

You say you're "doing okay."

You change the subject when their name comes up. And little by little, you begin to grieve **alone**.

Here's the thing...grief was never meant to be carried that way.

It's not something you "**get over**."

It's something you learn to carry. And that doesn't happen all at once. It happens in

moments. In conversations. In memories. In the quiet acknowledgment that your life changed and you're still trying to find your footing inside it.

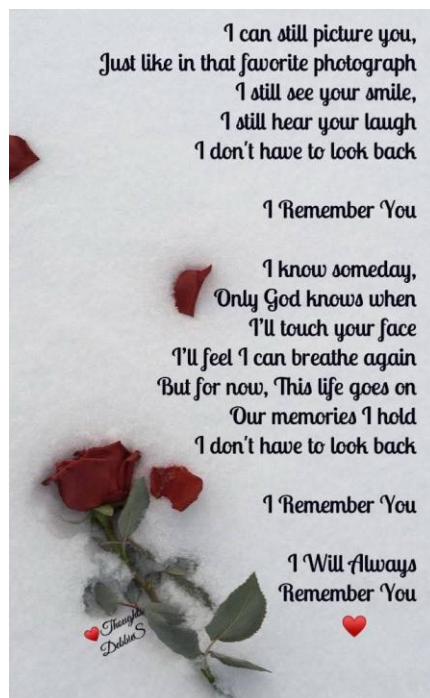
So if you've been holding it in, and you've been telling yourself you should be further along, you're not behind.

You're grieving. **Grief has no timeline.**

And you don't have to do that alone.

Gary Sturgis Author: *'SURVIVING GRIEF - 365 Days A Year'*

Grief changes shape. But it never ends. People have a misconception that you can deal with it and say "it's gone and I'm better." They're wrong! ~ Actor Keanu



It's not the moment they died.

It's not the funeral.

It's not the "I'm so sorry" texts or the casseroles dropped at your door.

It's everything after that.

It's the part no one warns you about—the gray space of grief. Where the world keeps moving, but you're suspended.

Not fully in the past. Not fully in the future.

Just... here. In between.

Where you forget what joy used to feel like.

Where smiles feel foreign and guilt creeps in if you catch yourself laughing.

Where people assume you're "doing better" because you showed up to work or answered a text.

But inside?

You're lost.

Not broken exactly. Just... altered.

Like a radio slightly out of tune.

Like a photo that won't come into focus.

The gray space is quiet.

But not peaceful.

It's the space where grief settles when the world stops watching.

And if you're in it—

You're not alone.

You're not doing it wrong.

You're surviving the part no one talks about.

And one day, color might return.

But for now, it's okay to sit in the gray.

Grieving Moms Facebook Page



Grief isn't poetic. It's brutal.

It tears at you in silence, in the middle of the night when the world's asleep and you can still hear their voice echoing in your head.

It's not just sadness — it's rage, emptiness, guilt, confusion. It's love with nowhere to go.

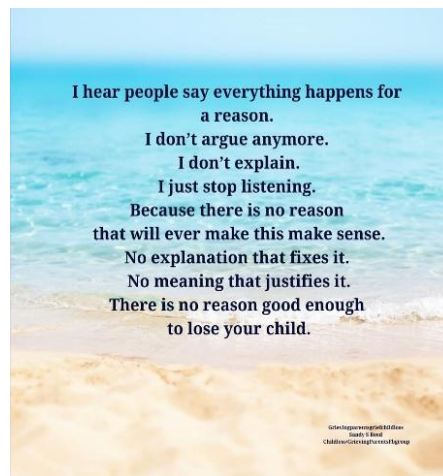
It's the sound of laughter that hurts now. It's the familiar scent that makes your chest tighten.

It's walking through life half-alive,

pretending to function while a part of you is buried with them.

Some days you convince yourself you're healing. Other days, it feels like the first day all over again — raw, screaming, unbearable. Grief changes you. It breaks you open in ways that can never be mended the same. You start to understand pain in colors — shades of black, blue, and the kind of gray that never turns to light.

It's love's shadow — endless, haunting, real. And you carry it, every damn day, because you have no choice.



The first 30 days after a loss don't feel like 30 days.

They feel like one long, disorienting stretch of time where nothing makes sense. People might call it "the early stages of grief," but that doesn't even really come close. Because this isn't a stage. It's shock. And it's trying to understand something your mind hasn't caught up to yet. And no one really prepares you for what those first days are like.

It Doesn't Feel Real

In the beginning, there's a sense that this can't actually be happening. You might go through the motions, making calls, answering messages, handling arrangements, but underneath all of that, there's a disbelief. You wake up and for a moment everything feels normal.

And then it hits you again. That moment doesn't just happen once.

It happens over and over. Your mind is trying to protect you, letting the truth sink in slowly.

You're Functioning...But Not Really

From the outside, it might look like you're holding things together. You're talking to people. Making decisions. Showing up where you need to. But inside, everything feels foggy. Simple things take more effort. You forget what you were doing. You lose track of conversations. This is what people often call "grief brain." It's not weakness. It's what happens when your mind is overwhelmed.

There's So Much to Do...When You Can Barely Think

The first few weeks often come with responsibilities you didn't ask for. Funeral arrangements. Paperwork. Phone calls. Decisions that feel impossible to make. And all of it is happening at a time when your ability to process anything feels limited. It can feel unfair. Because it is. You're being asked to function in a moment when everything inside you is struggling just to keep up.

People Show Up...And Then Things Get Quiet

In the beginning, there's often an outpouring of support. Messages. Food. People checking in. And for a little while, you're surrounded. But as days pass, that support naturally starts to fade. Not because people don't care. But because life pulls them back into their routines. This is when the quiet sets in. And sometimes, that quiet can feel heavier than the loss itself.

Your Emotions Might Not Look the Way You Expected

You might cry constantly.

Or you might not cry at all. You might feel waves of sadness, or moments of numbness where you don't feel much of anything. You might feel anger. Confusion. Even brief moments of relief, especially if your loved one was suffering. All of it can feel conflicting. All of it can feel wrong. But it isn't. There's no single way grief is supposed to show up.

Nights Can Be the Hardest

During the day, there are distractions. Things that need your attention. People around you. Noise. But at night...everything slows down. That's when the reality can feel the heaviest. The absence becomes more noticeable. The quiet feels louder. And sometimes, sleep doesn't come easily. Or when it does, you wake up feeling the loss all over again.

You Keep Reaching for Them

This is something people don't talk about enough. The instinct to reach for them doesn't disappear. You might go to call them. Text them. Turn to share something small from your day. And then you remember. It's a small moment...but it carries a lot of weight. And it happens more times than you expect.

There's No "Right Way" to Do These Days

People might offer advice. Things you "should" do. Ways you're "supposed" to feel. But the truth is...there isn't a right way through the first 30 days. Some people stay busy. Some people pull back. Some people need to talk. Some don't. You don't have to follow anyone else's timeline. You just have to get through each day as it comes.

What Might Help (Even Just a Little)

In these early days, it's not about

healing.
It's about getting through.

So keep it simple.
Eat something, even if you don't feel like it.
Rest when you can.
Accept help when it's offered.
Let people sit with you without feeling like you have to say anything.
Take things one hour at a time if you need to.
That's enough.

If You're In This Right Now

If you're somewhere in these first 30 days, what you're feeling, whatever it is, is part of this.
The confusion.
The exhaustion.
The moments where it doesn't feel real.
You're not doing this wrong.
You're responding to something life-changing in the only way a human being can.
And even though it may feel like you're completely alone in it...you're not.
There are others who understand this space.
Who have sat in these same days.
Who are walking it too.

As Bereaved Parents the first 30 day can last for years. Parents are considered to be newly bereaved up to and through year four. Be gentle with yourself. You are Grieving.

My name is Gary, author of 'SURVIVING GRIEF – 365 Days A Year' as a daily companion.

A Father's Pain

By Don Batson South KC TCF

Sometimes a father wishes
That time could rewind
And that the sands
Of an hourglass could rise.

Sometimes he craves
That the moments he's lost
Could be found again
And hope restored.

Sometimes a father needs
The music to be unwritten
And somehow the winter
Changed into spring.

Sometimes he wants
To be made young again
And that his future is
Still in front of him.

Sometimes a father wishes
That the pain in his heart
Could be replaced with
The smiles he's lost.

Sometimes he longs to
Once again feel all the hugs
He cherished so much
When he was welcomed home.

Sometimes a father's spirit is
So deeply scarred
That his mind could never
Find a way to heal his heart.

Sometimes a father cries
And can't believe that
There isn't a way
To see his children again.

Sometimes a father realizes
That the only way
To do all of this
Is to join his girls in Heaven.



Grief has seasons.

Not the kind you can track on a calendar.

Not winter, spring, summer, fall.

But the seasons of the soul.

There's the early season—the stormy one—where everything is loud and raw and sharp. Where tears come without warning, and the pain sits on your chest like a weight that won't move.

Then comes the quiet season. The outside world seems normal, but you feel like a stranger in it. People think you're okay again. But inside, it's still gray. Still empty. Still aching.

There's the angry season, too. The one where you're mad at everything and nothing. Where you snap, retreat, question everything, and silently scream at the unfairness of it all.

And the numb season—when it doesn't hurt as much, but you also don't feel much of anything. You float. You function. You wonder if this is healing or just surviving.

And maybe, eventually... the tender season arrives. Not a season

without sadness, but one where the memories bring more warmth than sting. Where the love feels alive, even in the absence.

But here's what they never told us:
These seasons don't come in order.

They don't stay for a set time.

They loop.

They repeat.

They collide.

One day you're okay.

The next, you're not.

And that's not failure.

That's grief.

Grief doesn't follow the rules.

But it does follow love.

And love, real love, lasts forever.

So, if you're in a hard season right now, hold on.

Another one will come.

Not easier... just different.

And eventually, you'll learn to live in the rhythm of them all.

Written by: Aimee Suyko - In Their Footsteps



To My Husband

Your tears flow within your heart.

Mine flow down my cheeks.

Your anger lies with thoughts and movements.

Mine gallops forth for all to see.

Your despair shows in your now dull eyes.

Mine shows in line after written line.

You grieve over the death of your son,

I grieve over the death of my baby.

But we're still the same, still one.

Only we grieve at different times,
Over different memories and at different lengths.

Yet we both realize the death of our child.

--Pam Burden, TCF Augusta, GA

The friendships that survived
your grief are the ones that didn't
require you to perform
being okay.

The ones where you could just be
wherever you actually were.

Those are different.

You know which ones they are.

HONESTGRIEF.COM

To the mother who has lost her only child, or has no surviving children, the thought of Mother's Day sends a stabbing pain that only the ones of us who are in this situation can understand. We begin to notice Mother's Day cards slipped in right after Valentine's Day along with the Easter cards. Even before Easter the TV advertising starts. We try to blot this all out but our subconscious keeps reminding us, the day is coming closer.

For the first two years we celebrated Mother's Day for my mother and sister very quietly. The third year after my daughter Shawna's death, we decided to go to a local restaurant featuring a nice buffet. We arrived early hoping to avoid the crowd. A very flustered hostess greeted us and found a table for us. The tables had been pushed close together to accommodate more people. It was already becoming very crowded. She asked the question, "How many mothers?" It was then we noticed the flowers she was carrying. Someone managed to stammer out, three- three- mothers. She handed us each a flower, while glancing around to find a table for the next group of people. She didn't notice the one she handed me was pretty battered.

My sister wanted to give me hers or get another. "No, it's okay," I said. The stem was bent, but not broken completely. A wilted, tired flower was hanging from the stem. I brought it home and propped it up in a glass of water to revive it. You see, I could identify with that flower.

As a mother without my child, I have felt so bruised and battered.

Somehow through all the pain, tears and loneliness, like the flower, I have been bent but never quite broken.

--Donna Frechec, TCF Enid, OK

Missing and Valuing on Mother's Day

Mother's Day is a special day, and special days are hard after the death of a child. It is a normal and natural thing for either parent for the first few years after the death to zero in on who is missing rather than who is left...and I was no different.

Fortunately for me, not long after the Atlanta TCF chapter formed, a local psychiatrist, Dr. Victor Gonzales, spoke one evening shortly before Mother's Day. He told of his parents' loss of their first two children. His story, of how his life had been influenced and molded by his mother's reaction, touched me. He spoke of how he and his siblings who came later were forever denied his mother's happiness and joy. She was unable to value what she had left as much as what she had lost.

Dr. Gonzales said he spent a great deal of his childhood trying to make his mother happy, always failing and always feeling there must be something lacking in him that caused him to fail. The picture in my mind of him and his siblings always trying and always failing through no fault of their own, made a great impact on me. I determined from that day forward that my daughter would not have to lament later in life that she had been denied my happiness and joy because her brother died.

On Mother's Day now I make room for both missing and valuing, for they are not, I have discovered, mutually exclusive. Now when I go to the cemetery with my rosebud on my day, my daughter has no part in my needs while I am there. When I come home, my son doesn't interfere with my acceptance and appreciation of my daughter's expression of love. She gives me a gift on my day, & I give her one in return. It's probably the best gift I could possible give her—my happiness and joy for life. She is as important as what I have lost, and I know her worth.

If you are fortunate enough to have surviving children, I hope you too are able to value as well as miss. There's room for both, you know.

--Mary Cleckley, *Bereaved Parents of the USA*

Something to Think About

Life made us a bargain,
when we first came into this
world:

That as surely as we live, someday
we will die,

As surely as we laughed,
someday we will cry.

So that for all the assets that life and
health and joy bring,

They are balanced on earth by hate
and disease and sorrow.

Our sorrow is the price we pay for all
the love and joy we took so
freely.

We needn't weep such bitter tears if
our laughter had not been so
sweet for years.

If the price I pay for loving Jared is
the pain, anguish and sorrow I
now have,

Then I know I got a bargain
to have had him for 13 years!

If the only way to avoid the pain is to
also avoid the pleasure of loving
someone,

Then love them with all your heart
and soul, and mourn their loss the
same,

And count your life a bargain
for having loved.

--Dale Travathan, TCF Tulsa
author of *Kellie's Book*

The Father's Grief

--By David Pellegrin, Honolulu, HI

At my second meeting of The Compassionate Friends three years ago, one of the mothers said how nice it was to see a man attending, since "men grieve differently from women."

Her remark was no doubt meant to help put me at ease. I hadn't said a thing so far, and might have been intimidating in my silence, but it caught me off guard. What I was feeling after George's death, was so absolute, so awful, how could it possibly come with any "differences"? Would one grieve differently for an infant than for an adolescent? For a son than for a daughter? Surely grief was absolute for both mothers and fathers.

Over time I came to
acknowledge the differences the
well-meaning mother had in mind:

- Neither I nor the other men who occasionally attended talked much;

the women talked freely.

- I sensed I was better at compartmentalizing my grief than the mothers, better at keeping a lid on it socially and at work.
- My male friends seemed less comfortable than female friends in talking about George, bringing up his name, or even looking at his pictures.
- I came to see how intensely I felt that I had let my son down as his protector, the father's primary role.

Shortly after becoming editor of my chapter newsletter, I sent a copy to my friend Jack Knebel in California. Jack and his wife, Linda, had been involved with a TCF chapter after the death of their daughter, Hollis. He replied, "It's good to see that a man is taking an active role in the group." Then he went on to write movingly about those male-female grieving differences. The rest of his letter, which touched me deeply, follows:

"...Several years after Hollis died, Linda and I were being trained by TCF to be "buddies" for newly bereaved parents. One of the exercises was to list all the unhelpful things that others had said in trying to comfort us, so that we wouldn't make the same mistakes. The other trainees (who were all women) made long lists, and did it with enthusiasm. When the lists were read aloud, they nodded knowingly at every entry and eventually hooted and howled with derision at the worst (some of which were pretty bad). When it came my turn, I held up an empty page and said,

"People may have said such things to me. I just don't recall. What I do remember is that people tried to tell me how sad they were for us, how much they loved Hollis and how much they cared about us. I remember one of my law partners hugging me in the halls of our very stiff and proper law firm. I remember men who had never told me anything more personal than their reactions to a Giants' loss crying at our loss and their fears.

"You women are used to talking about your emotions and about personal things. I wasn't and my friends weren't either. So the fact that we could do so was a great gift, and it wasn't marred in the slightest by someone's choice of words.

"Now, the shell has been broken and I find it easier to talk about my emotions, my hopes and fears, about those things that really are important. And that for me was one of Hollis' greatest gifts.

"I know that even after George's death, he is a major part of your life. My guess is that you're becoming more open to the gifts that he and those who care about you are able to give. With compassion and friendship, Jack"

Gratitude...The Key to Happiness

I am convinced that the real key to happiness is gratitude.... I have thought a lot about this idea since my son, Mark, died five years ago. At first I was offended by people who smiled or even laughed during a TCF meeting. These were people who seemed to have somehow re-entered the land of the living. ...How dare they laugh? How dare they appear normal when their children have died? But over the last five years I have learned three valuable lessons:

- *Life goes on and we must too.* Gradually the pain eases and the warm memories replace the sadness. Gradually we return to life. One day we find that it is 11:00 am and we have not thought about our child yet. At first we feel guilt, but then we also realize we are going forward. We will never forget, but we decide that the loss of our child will not be the all-consuming factor in our life.... I am convinced that this is what our children would want for us.

- *We become grateful for what we have, not focused on what we have lost.* I see people in our chapter's meetings every month who have gone through "every parent's nightmare" and want no part of life again. But I ask that [they] also think about the ways they have been blessed, as well as hurt. In my experience, most people have more to be thankful for than they realize: health, other children, a loving family...life in a free country, faith that works for them, a true best friend, a spouse whom they love. Nobody has it all, but compared to most, ...we have a lot.

- *The life we now lead will be*

better than it would have been. That does not make our child's death a good thing. It just means that our child's life mattered, and it has changed us forever. It means that in some small way the world will be better because our child lived, and we are the ones who can make it so. We have a new sense of priorities. We don't "sweat the small stuff." We know what matters because we know what is irreplaceable. And we know how deeply other people hurt, because we, too, have been there. We "know how they feel."

And when our life is different and better because our child lived, then that child is never forgotten. Each of us would do anything in the world to go back in time, but we can't. It is up to us now to go forward, and we can.

--Rich Edler, CF, South Bay/LA, CA

Upcoming Event:

Our Annual Walk to Remember will be held September 26, 2026 At Waterfall Park (just behind Bass Pro) In Independence, MO. More details to follow.

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 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 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.