



The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Published Quarterly by The Topeka TCF Chapter

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National TCF Website:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter Website:
www.tcftopeka.org

Oct ~ Nov ~ Dec~ 2023
Editor: Susan Chan
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OCTOBER MEETING

Monday, October 23, 2023
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

“Handling the Holidays”- Beginning with Halloween and running through Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah and New Year’s, as grievers we are faced with the onslaught of holiday activities and “cheer” which we may find difficult and hard to deal with. At this meeting we will discuss some strategies for making this time of year less stressful. We will also talk about ways to include your loved ones in whatever holiday traditions you are comfortable with. Plan to share any ideas that have been helpful for you in handling the holidays. We can all learn from each other’s experiences.

NOVEMBER MEETING

Monday, November 27, 2023
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

“Good Grief Rituals” - Many parents have found that having rituals to incorporate as part of special days (birthdays, death anniversaries, holidays, etc.) have been helpful to them in getting through these especially emotionally daunting days. We will discuss why people have rituals, what constitutes a ritual, what makes a ritual meaningful and present ideas for rituals to use in remembering and memorializing your child. Group members are encouraged to share the rituals they have found meaningful and helpful to them.

DECEMBER MEETING

Monday, December 11, 2023
Most Pure Heart of Mary Church
3601 S.W. 17th Street, Topeka, KS
7 - 8:30 p.m.

Note Date Change!

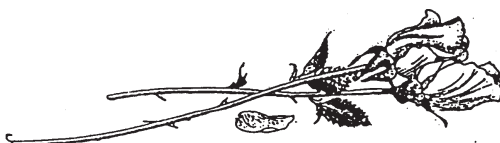
“Memorial Candle Lighting”- Please plan to join us for this special event to honor the lives of our children, grandchildren and siblings who “left too soon”. You are asked to bring a framed desktop photo of your loved one (if you do not have photos, plan to bring something that represents them to you). During the Candle Lighting we will share special music, poetry and each person will have an opportunity to light a votive candle in memory of that special life and place that candle by their photo/memento. You are encouraged to bring your or your child’s favorite holiday treat to share with the group. Votive candles are provided. PLEASE NOTE DATE CHANGE: This event takes the place of our regular December support group meeting.

Meetings are always held on the fourth Monday of each month unless otherwise noted. Listen to radio & TV for cancellations due to severe weather conditions. Always check the Topeka TCF Chapter website (www.tcftopeka.org) under “Meetings” for latest information.

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purposes are to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experience following the death of a child of any age, from any cause; and to foster the physical and emotional health of all bereaved parents, grandparents and surviving siblings.

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



We Need Not Walk Alone

***We Would Like to Thank the Following for
Sponsoring this Edition of the Newsletter***

*Gary & Susan Chan in loving memory of their daughter
Rachael Reneé Chan who was born on December 28th*

*Bob & Kayla Dieball in loving memory of their daughter
Callea Breiner who died on December 19th*

*Carla Gilbert in loving memory of her son Richard Gilbert
who was born on October 20th and her
sister Janet Pace who was born on October 9th*

*Doug & Connie Gould in loving memory of their son
Marshall Gould who died on December 24th*

*Mark & Debi Harvey in loving memory of their son
Natan Harvey who was born on December 9th*



Additional Support Group Resources

HEALs - Healing after loss of suicide offers support to all survivors affected by the loss of a loved one to suicide. Meetings are at 6:30-8:00 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. Contact Information: email TopekaHeals@gmail.com

Pregnancy and Infant Loss Group - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month from 6-8 p.m. at the Pozez Education Center. The group, which has regular meetings to share information and experiences, also has a blog for members that offers communication, resources and support. If you are interested in learning more about the blog, please email irosen@stormontvail.org. For information call (785) 354-5225.

From Victims to Survivors - Support group for families who have had a loved one murdered. The group meets the fourth or last Wednesday of each month at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 4775 S.W. 21st. For more information, call Bill Lucero at 232-5958 or see <http://fromvictimstosurvivors.com>.

Midland Care Center for Hope and Healing - This program helps those who have experienced the death of a loved one. Programs for children, teens and adults include individual counseling, support groups, family evenings and camps. Services are available to anyone, regardless of past use of Midland Care Hospice or other services, wherever services are needed, at Midland Care or in the community. Midland Care is a member of the National Alliance for Grieving Children. 1112 SW 6th Ave. Topeka, KS 66606. Hours: 8 am - 5 pm, Mon - Fri. Phone answered 24/7. (785) 232-2044 <http://www.midlandcare.org>

**A Special and Important Message to
Our New Compassionate Friends**

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

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

---Topeka TCF Chapter Steering Committee

TCF National Office e-mail:
nationaloffice@compassionatefriends.org

Compassionate Friends web address:
www.compassionatefriends.org

Topeka TCF Chapter web and e-mail addresses:
www.tcftopeka.org tcftopeka@gmail.com

Our Thanks to: Midland Care Connection for giving us a mailbox and Most Pure Heart of Mary Church for allowing us to meet at their facility. A special Thank You to ProPrint for helping to underwrite a portion of the printing cost of this newsletter.

New Phone Contact #
**As of 1 January, 2022, the new phone contact
number for the Topeka Chapter of The
Compassionate Friends is:**
1-785-817-1748

Pro 
Print
DIGITAL PRINT AND COPY SERVICES

4931 WEST 6TH ST., STE 104 1033 SW GAGE BLVD, STE 200
LAWRENCE, KS 66049 TOPEKA, KS 66604
785.842.3610 785.272.0070

Online Support Communities: An Important Way That We're Here for our TCF Family.

One of the most far-reaching and valuable ways that we offer support to TCF members is through our online chat and private Facebook groups. With over 286,000 followers on our main Compassionate Friends USA Facebook page, we also offer over 40 different private Facebook groups serving 102,000 members collectively. Additionally, TCF offers chat rooms that provide a space for bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings to meet every day to connect, share, and support each other. To find support via an online group of The Compassionate Friends, please visit <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/.../online-communities/>.

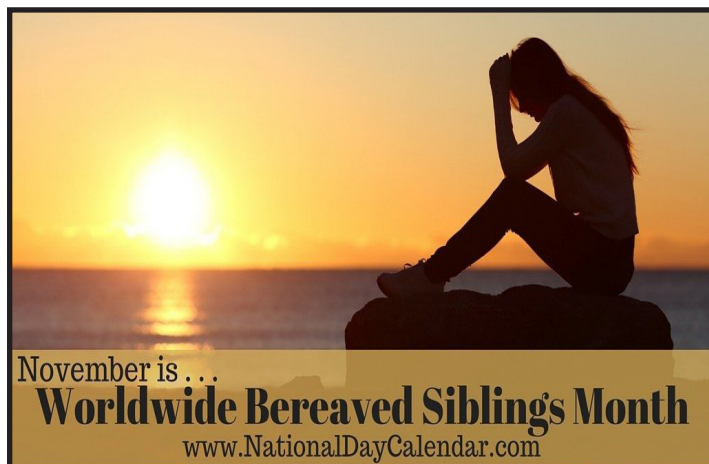
How To Access To Compassionate Friends Facebook Groups

For the national TCF Facebook page go to Facebook and enter Compassionate Friends USA.

For individual groups within Facebook, please go to compassionatefriends.org or use key word "Compassionate Friends". Click on Find Support then click On-Line Communities then click on View Groups or click on Resources then click on 24/7Private Facebook Groups. The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages are moderated by bereaved parents, siblings, or grandparents, and may not be accessed unless a request to join is approved by a moderator. Please click on the link next to the group you wish to join and answer the screening questions so we can confirm your request. If you are waiting approval, please message one of the administrators. Join requests to our Facebook groups must be requested personally, therefore when you wish to share the group with someone please pass along the link to the group.

Accessing Brochures/E-Newsletter

To access various brochures on dealing with various aspects of grief go to compassionatefriends.org or use key word "Compassionate Friends." Click on Resources then click Brochures Available. You can also register for the national e-newsletter at this site also.



The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all children who have died

Worldwide Candle Lighting®

... that their light may always shine.

**Second Sunday in December
7 PM Around the Globe**



Softly,

The memories
envelope my consciousness
Playing out in my mind.
Here in my heart
Always bringing a smile
Now and forever
I shall remember you.

Since you've been gone
The memory we hold
Ever closer in our hearts
Passage of time, can't
Heal or erase the joy that you gave.
Now brings saving grace.

Little child of my heart
I dream of you still.
Never will we forget you.
During times of bitter anguish,
Saying you name
As if you were alive, makes the
Yeaming a little sweeter.

Dana Gensler
TCF of So. Central Kentucky

What is a Memory?

*It is the faculty of beholding the golden rays of the sunset, after the night has fallen.
It is the ability to bear in mind the sweet melody after the instruments have ceased playing. It is a conversation with someone who can no longer speak....
and seeing a smile on a face no longer here.*

~ Karen Russell

And We Remember . . .

Because of the potential for the hurtful crime of identity theft, TCF Chapter Newsletters will now only publish the date of a child's birth or death without listing the year of the event. This is a directive from TCF National to protect all TCF members. Due to space constraints, only those families who remain current on our newsletter mailing database will be included in the We Remember section.

OCTOBER ~

Olivia Lynn Anderson, daughter of Suzannah Anderson; sister of Eli Anderson who was born on October 11th

Jordan Robert Barranco, son of Juan and Elizabeth Barranco, who was born on October 30th

Jimmie Bass IV, son of Jim and Jerri Bass, who died on October 31st

Brian Lynn Blecha, son of Lynn and Alice Blecha, who died October 15th

Derek G. Bodeman, son of Becky S. Bodeman, who was born on October 29th

Monty Brentlinger, son of Don and Carolyn Brentlinger, who died on October 21st

Skylar Callahan, son of Gena Callahan, brother of Branden, Alex, Chris and Jacob, who died on October 30th

Seth Austin Carney, son of Clay and Michelle Carney, died October 13th

Kale Cauthon, son of Denise Cauthon; brother of Josh and Cam, who died on October 15th

Eric Joseph Conley, son of Tom and Barbara Conley, who was born on October 22nd

Gerald (Jerry) Eberhardt, son of Duane and Mary Eberhardt, who died October 25th

Chazz Robert Exon, son of Stacy Mackey, who was born on October 30th

Richard Brian Gilbert, son of Rick and Carla Gilbert, who was born on October 20th

Justin Grabhorn, son of Philip and Barbara Grabhorn, who was born on October 10th

Tasman McKay Grout, daughter of Pam Grout, who was born on October 8th and died on October 15th

Mitchell Hermreck, son of Dennis and Ann Hermreck; brother of Shelby and Raegan, who was born on October 14th

Abigail Hosie, daughter of Matt and Jennifer Hosie, who was born on October 30th

Vernon A. Jamison, Sr., son of Eugene A. and Mayverdis Jamison died October 1st

Gabriel Kidd, son of Julie Kidd, who died on October 1st
Mark McCullough, son of Bonnie Bennett, who was born on October 21st

Abigail Medley, daughter of Terry Medley and Jennifer Hoise, who was born on October 30th

Jessica Rae Meyer, daughter of James Robert Meyer and Jennifer Jean Meyer, and sister of Rebecca Meyer, who was born on October 27th

Janet Pace, daughter of Barbara Hale, sister of Carla Gilbert and Sara Wallo, and mother of Shauna Andersen, born October 9th

Robin Lynn Paulson, daughter of Frank and Brenda Bissey and sister of Brad Bissey, born October 8th

Sarah N. Rice, daughter of Gary and Peggy Rice, who died on October 6th

Brian Keith Robinson, son of Vernon and Pauline Robinson, born October 3rd; died October 13th

Luke Rojas, son of Wilma W. Rojas, born October 22nd and died October 29th

Abbey Rubottom, daughter of Darcey Evans, who was born on October 23rd

Patrick Sprowl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sprowl, born October 18th

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, who died on October 11th

Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who was born on October 28th

NOVEMBER ~

Jimmie Bass IV, son of Jim and Jerri Bass, who was born on November 3rd

Spencer O'Bleness, son of Rebecca O'Bleness, who was born on November 15th and died on November 8th

Skylar Callahan, son of Gena Callahan, brother of Branden, Alex, Chris and Jacob, who was born on November 4th

Kristi Diaz, daughter of Julie Diaz, born November 7th

Jeffrey Hoium, son of Mel and Helen Hoium, died on November 12th

Steve Isley, son of Web and Jeanette Isley, who died on November 6th

Karen Kay Karnes, daughter of Wilson and Maxine Karnes, who died November 19th

Morgan Kottman, daughter of Christine Kottman, who died on November 21st

Tabitha Krystofosky, sister of Darrell "Bo" Cremer, Jr., who died on November 27th

Ben Lake, grandson of Patty Lake, who died on November 29th

Christen (Chris) Edward Locke, son of Alfonzo E. Locke Jr. and Sheila D. Locke, who was born on November 29th

Phylles McCarthy, daughter of Janet Hamilton who was born in November.

Jessica Rae Meyer, daughter of James Robert Meyer and Jennifer Jean Meyer, and sister of Rebecca Meyer, who died on November 16th

Kyle Neigh, son of Rosemary Robledo, who died on November 19th

Kiley Ramey, daughter of Gary and Linda Ramey, who died on November 24th

Adam J. Reams, son of Gene and Sandy Reams; brother of Nick Reams, born on November 24th

Louis Walter and Teresa Caolina Stroble-Bernal, son and daughter of Raja Strobe and Beatriz Bernal, stillborn November 1st

Jason R. VanDam, son of Will and Kay Hasty, died November 5th
Donald (Donnie) Warren, son of Nancy McCune, who was born on November 26th

Eric Edward Gordon Wiebler, son of David and Laura Wiebler, born November 15th

Kenneth Williams, son of Clayton and Sharon Williams, who was born on November 14th and died on November 21st

Richard Wilson, son of Kathrine Susan Whittington, who died on November 10th

DECEMBER ~

Carlie Almond, daughter of Brad and Amy Almond, who died on December 3rd

Kyle Bartley, son of Susan Bartley, brother of Cody Bartley, who died on December 23rd

Lori Ann Becerra, daughter of Mike and Ginny Becerra, born on December 15th and died on December 15th

Ryan Broxterman, son of Kevin and Susan Broxterman, who died on December 6th

Kristy Burton, daughter of Bonnie Bennett, who was born on December 22nd

Rachael Reneé Chan, daughter of Gary and Susan Chan, born on December 28th

Tyler Kraft, son of Tom and Mary Sue Kraft, who died on December 9th

Kevin Lee Cronister, son of Richard and Judy Cronister, who died on December 10th

Curtis Junior Dickinson, son of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 24th

Callea Breiner, daughter of Bob and Kayla Dieball, who who died on December 19th

Angel Winter Dawn Dickinson, daughter of Curtis and Debbi Dickinson, stillborn on December 25th

Phylles McCarthy, daughter of Janet Hamilton who died in December

Marshall Gould, son of Doug and Connie Gould, who was born on December 27th and died on December 24th

John Carl Harrington, son of Mary Harrington, born on December 15th

Nathan Harvey, son of Mark and Debi Harvey; brother of Rachel, Amanda and Caleb Harvey; grandson of Velata Tibbs, born on December 9th

Shawn Michael Hatfield, son of Hank and Cathy Harman, who died on December 5th

Austin Tyler Miller, grandson of Earl and Linda Frey, stillborn on December 3rd

David D. Morris, son of Merwin (Bud) and Velma C. Morris, born on December 18th

Brent Andrew Nothern, son of Austin and Marianna Nothern, who died on December 14th

Krystil M. Pearson, daughter of Patti Cox and sister of Kendall Pressler, who was born on December 24th

Jamie Lynn Russell, daughter of John and Elaine Chandler, who died on December 29th

Patrick Sprowl, son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Sprowl, died on December 10th

Jeffery Alan Steinbock, son of Joe and Anne Steinbock, born on December 13th

Nicholas Swanson, son of Candi Kuipers; brother of Tayla and Jaythan, who died on December 23rd

Caldyn David Wasinger, son of Austin and Krista Wasinger, who died on December 1st

*Together, we shall join hearts and hands
across the earth and decorate
the world with hope and healing and
remembered laughter.*

*We shall remain forever linked
through the love of our absent children,
parents, husbands and wives, siblings,
grandparents, friends - all of our loved
ones who danced across the rainbow
ahead of us.*

*We are a family circle -Broken by
death, mended by love! May this day,
and every day, be days for us to laugh
and sing, to dance and dream*

*May this day, and everyday, be days of
celebration and the chance to give one
more hug, to say one more, "I love you."
May love be what you remember most!*

~ Darcie Sims

Falling for you....

...while leaves fall, the river drifts by and friends sit, speaking of loved ones lost to suicide. Like the river, conversation drifts. Some smile at memories shared. Others cry tears of regret, anger, guilt, despair; tears for what could have been, but is no more. Through the years, this group of friends has learned that words fall short of describing sorrow. And so we sit silently, watching the....

...falling leaves....falling tears....falling for you....

...until the time comes to fall in line and drift toward a table adorned with recently fired clay shapes. At an earlier gathering, I molded soft gray clay then impressed it with words and symbols of your life. Although I don't speak of it, I know that yours is not the only life interrupted. My life is also damaged, diminished, in danger of falling apart in oh so many ways. This small group shares space with those we miss and love, both living and dead; in this, my child's birth and death season. How I long to see you float free with the....



....falling leaves....falling tears....falling for you....

...and I long to connect again with you but my plea falls on deaf ears. I'm left with the task of creating your wind chime. A year ago, on your birthday, leaves fell as I stamped the soft clay heart with musical notes, falling stars, hovering doves and the words "treasured memories." Now the clay has cured and along the holes in the edge of the stamped heart, I tie other clay shapes with lengths of string – my heartstrings. I add an anchor, a porcelain leaf inscribed with the words "falling in love." The pieces fall in place like....

...falling leaves....falling tears....falling for you....

...and then I playfully brush my fingers through your wind chime; fingers that long to run through your hair. The chime whispers your name but its music can never fill my heart like the sound of your voice. Fall – a time for friends to make wind chimes and memories. A time for....falling leaves....falling tears....falling eternally for you.

~ Carol Clum
TCF Medford Oregon

Halloween

It is here, this day of merriment and children's pleasure.
Gremlins and goblins
and ghosties at the door
of your house.

And the other children
come to the door of your mind.
Faces out of the past,
small ghosts with sweet, painted faces.

They do not shout.
Those children
who no longer march laughing
on cold Halloween nights,
they stand at the door of your mind

and you will let them in,
so that you can give them
the small gifts of Halloween,
a smile and a tear.

*Sascha Wagner
The Compassionate Friends*



THANKSGIVING

November: Cool days, chilly nights, autumn leaves changing colors, football games, apple cider and pumpkin pie. Ah. November! . . . Is it November already? Oh, no! Make it go away! Just let me sleep; wake me up in January. November is here, the start of the holiday season.

This is the time of year most bereaved parents dread. This is the time of year when thoughts turn to spending time with family and friends and celebrating. Holiday decorations start popping up everywhere you turn and holiday music begins to play at the malls and on the radio. People are busy cleaning their home, and are all abuzz with getting ready for. . . Oh, no! Thanksgiving!

Everyone is asking what are you doing for Thanksgiving?" For the bereaved parent, especially the newly bereaved, this question can become daunting and almost horrifying. What am I doing for Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving - giving thanks. But I don't feel very thankful.

How can I be thankful, when my child lives no more?

How can I be thankful, when he/she will never again walk through my front door?

How can I be thankful, when my eyes are filled with tears?

How can I be thankful, when he/she won't be here throughout the years?

How can I be thankful, when my heart will never mend?

How can I be thankful, when I've lost my dearest friend?

How can I be thankful, when his/her hugs and kisses have now ceased?

How can I be thankful, and sit down to a feast?

How can I be thankful, when my heart is filled with sorrow?

How can I be thankful, when I can hardly make it to tomorrow?

What do you answer? What will you do this year? For some, the choice is to keep the same tradition they have in the past. Others choose to remain home and ignore the holiday completely.

There are parents who go on vacation or go out to Thanksgiving dinner at a restaurant. Newly bereaved parents may question "what am I supposed to do?" There is no standard right or wrong answer. Whatever feels the most comforting is the right answer for you. Family members or friends might disagree with your decision and say you are wrong. This often happens if you decide to break tradition, want to be alone, or decide not to celebrate at all. People can become very insistent, and tell you that Thanksgiving is about being with others. I have found that

my choice has varied over the years from choosing to be alone and not acknowledge the holiday at all; to going to friends' and family members' homes; to just having dinner at home and when asked, I say, "I know that you may not like my answer, but still. I need to do what is best for me."

However you decide to spend this Thanksgiving, please remember that for however short or long your precious, awesome, amazing, wonderful child was with you here on earth, you are blessed to be their parent. You have been given a most spectacular gift—a one of a kind, unique, extraordinary child to carry in your heart, thoughts, and soul for all eternity. And this is a reason to be forever thankful.

From my home and heart to yours may you have a blessed Thanksgiving and may it be filled with peace.

~ Bev Rosen Katowitz
TCF, Charlotte, NC

Sometimes,
Memories are like the rain showers
Sprinkling down upon you
Catching you unaware.

Sometimes,
Memories are like thunderstorms
Beating down upon you,
Relentless in their downpour
And then they will cease,
Leaving you tired and bruised.

Sometimes,
Memories are like shadows
Sneaking up behind you
Following you around,
Then they disappear,
Leaving you sad and confused.

Sometimes,
Memories are like comforters
Surrounding you with warmth,
Luxuriously abundant,
And sometimes they stay,
Wrapping you in contentment.

By Marsha Updike
from Bereavement Magazine

HELPING CHILDREN GRIEVE AT HOLIDAY TIME

Holidays are usually times of sharing and togetherness, but after a death in the family, the holiday season can be difficult to endure for everyone--including the children. Traditions that bring about memories of a deceased loved one may bring about a flood of emotions for a child. According to Dr. Alan Wolfelt, author of *Helping Children Cope With Grief*, some families mistakenly try to deny these feelings by avoiding certain holiday customs...like putting up a tree or exchanging gifts. "Such avoidance is an impossible task in an environment that constantly reminds us of the holidays. The important question is 'Will the children struggle alone through the holidays or work through problems in the loving presence of adults?'" While there is no easy formula, Wolfelt offers these suggestions for adults to consider:

1) Be aware that your behavior influences a grieving child. "The child's ability to cope with the problem depends on the ability of important adults to express their grief and convey to the child that it's okay to express a full range of feeling." Adults must let children know that tears do not signal rejection but, rather, sadness. If a parent says, "I feel sad because I miss _____ ." the child will understand that emotions are an acceptable demonstration of grief.

2) Provide children with special amounts of attention and emotional support. Take an active role in helping children cope with grief. Children don't always show sadness as openly as adults.

3) Pay attention to the child's cues. Recognize that children need to talk and express their emotions - rather than just be talked to by an adult.

4) Create a special time during the holidays to talk about the deceased family member. Younger children might find it helpful to look at family photographs when they discuss their memories. Talking about good and bad memories gives the child permission to be sincere about emotions.

5) Don't avoid all family traditions during the holidays. Children might find comfort in such customs as decorating the tree or baking holiday cookies—"Traditions provide a structure for the expression of the child's thoughts and feelings." - but you might consider withdrawing a little from excessive holiday activities. Holidays are very stressful and, combined with the emotional weight of grieving, may drain children.

NOTE: While helping children cope with the pain of their grief during the holidays is difficult, slow and wearing, the process can also be enriching and fulfilling for loving adults.

~ Excerpted from *Helping Children Cope With Grief* by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Center for Loss and Life Transition
<http://www.centerforloss.com/>

1) **KIDS TALK ABOUT HOLIDAYS** - This is the time of year when there are lots of holidays - and holidays can be tough for kids who have had a death in the family. Other people may be expecting you to be happy and jolly, but you may not feel happy. It's okay to not be in the holiday spirit. Let yourself have a quiet and thoughtful holiday this year, if you want. But if you can be happy, that's good, too. Try to let yourself do what feels best.

Lots of kids have thought of good ideas to make their family holidays easier and more fun--even though they are missing the person who died. Here is what they suggest:

- The week before, we talked about what we wanted to do and what we did not want to do. That way, we didn't wonder so much and worry about how it would go.
- I liked helping at the place where the poor people came to eat. It was nice to be able to make someone else's day happy.
- We light a candle in memory of him. We keep it lit for lots of days and people ask us what it is for: We tell them it's for John.
- We went on a special trip.
- During Hanukkah, we tell what we think are the gifts he left for us. Like his sense of humor.
- When we were out of school, we got to drive around at night and look at the lights and stay up really late.
- I liked it when my friend's Mom took us shopping. That way, I could get a present for my Dad.
- We hung her stocking and filled it with candy for everyone to share.
- On Christmas Day, we got to go see a movie, and then we ate dinner with our neighbors.
- We looked at family albums all night. It made us cry some, but we laughed a lot, too.
- I thought the whole holiday was going to be terrible, but it wasn't as bad as I had thought.



A Christmas Story

When I was just a little girl
Around the age of three
I remember a Christmas
When Santa came to see me

A doll wrapped up
In a pretty bright red bow
Long golden hair to stroke
Oh my, how my heart glowed

And then came a Christmas
Later on in time
When I shared my first Christmas
With a son that was all mine

A few years later down the road
When he was only five
I didn't know it would be
The last Christmas in my life

Now on Christmas
As many in all these years
I spend my days at a grave
Shedding many tears

The Holidays come every year
That, I cannot change
But through all my memories
My memories I can rearrange

I can remember all the good years
That he and I had shared
I can still here the giggles
When he got that talking teddy bear

I can remember the hugs and squeals of "OH MOM"
As each gift he opened on that day
I can sit back and smile remembering
Before the angels took him away

Now I am older than I once used to be
But my mind drifts back
To what once was on Christmas
When my son was on earth with me

I tuck my head to fight the snow
As I wade through the fenced in graves
I've got my gift to give to him
On this years' Christmas Day

~ Sharon Bryant

In Memory of my son, Andrew Frank Dunbar
(Permission for TCF chapters to reprint granted by the author)

Christmas Eve



*Silent
Night, holy
Night ~*

"It's about time,"
he says quietly.

Deliberately, wordlessly,
they gather the materials
carefully put away last year,
the matches, candle, candle jar
to fend off the harsh winter wind.

Tis the season to be jolly ~

Slowly they drive toward the town's edge,
past homes with bright, blinking bulbs.

Cars of faraway relatives fill the drives.

Happy, laughing families, children home from school
pass on the way to midnight Mass.

It's the most wonderful time of the year ~

At last, town lights left far behind, they sit mute,
each wrapped in private cocoons of memories of
Christmas past, excited whispers from their room,
silly giggles, fervent good-night kisses, anticipation of morning.

On a cold winter's night that was so deep ~

Through the gate, down the drive, engine killed,
frozen grass crunching underfoot, hand-in-hand
they walk up the hill to the familiar moonlit stone. With
practiced hands they brush it clean, then prepare their votive Noel.

The world in solemn stillness lay ~

Lumps in throat, arm-in-arm, candles lit, they stand and weep,
But not so bitter as in years past. The pain's as deep but not so long,
as once again they dream of things that should have been but never were.

The stars in the sky look down where he lay ~

"Let's go," he says. She nods assent. They leave, though turn back once to see
the lonely flame of their lost child gleaming peacefully through the dark.

He whispers softly, his visit done -

"Merry Christmas and
good-night, my child.

~~ Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace ~

By Richard A. Dew, MD, TCF Knoxville, TN



Navigating the Ebb and Flow of Grief

At almost four years after the death of my daughter, I had thought it would be easier than this.

In those early days and months when my grief made it feel like I simply couldn't survive this loss, I saw others in support groups who had lost their loved ones many years before, and they seemed ok. They looked almost "normal" again. They told me it wouldn't always be like this. They said you learn to live with the pain, and it would lessen over time. They said you will eventually find joy and happiness again. They said you create a "new normal."

And they were right.

I have worked hard for almost four years on working through my grief. I have faced it head on through continual counseling and support groups and still seek out ways to express my pain, so as not to hold it in and let it consume me. Along the way, I have given myself permission to smile once more, and even to allow joy to enter my heart again. I have enjoyed my other children. I have volunteered my time with The Compassionate Friends. I have created my own grief support website. I have consciously tried to focus my energies on remembering my daughter's life rather than only looking at the pain her death has brought.

And yet grief remains a constant part of my life.

Grief is fickle. Unpredictable. And indifferent to whatever mood I'm in. Most days my grief lies dormant under the activities of everyday life. Little triggers will continually remind me it's there. A sad news story on the TV. A girl at

the park who reminds me of my daughter. But I can go about my regular routines with no interruptions. Other times, the triggers are bigger, and the grief bubbles up and takes over my mood. Tears well up behind my eyes, ready to release at the first opportunity. My patience seems to evaporate and everyday tasks become cumbersome, meaningless, and even difficult. Usually the bursts of grief from larger triggers only last a few hours or at most a few days.

But sometimes it lingers and grows.

What I didn't expect is that even coming on four years after her death, I still find myself in situations where grief becomes so overwhelming again that it feels like I've gone right back to the debilitating early days of grief. Feelings of sadness, pain, lethargy, dis-interest in things I normally enjoy. Going to work becomes a struggle. Even taking care of my kids feels like a burden. I know these periods require extra attention and care, and I navigate through the best I can, asking for support along the way. I just wonder if these episodes will ease over time, or if I should just expect them to become a permanent fixture of my "new normal" life?

If the death of my daughter has taught me anything -- and it has taught me A LOT -- it has taught me that we have more inner strength than we can ever imagine, and that with time, attention, and support, we can navigate through just about anything life might throw at us.

*~ Maria Kubitz
TCF Contra Costa County, CA
In Memory of my daughter, Margareta*

*The season of grief is our shutting down time.
We prepare the cottage of our hearts for winter,
securing our windows to the world, stocking the
cupboards with what will sustain us during the
cold and dark. Carefully we rebuild our inner fire, and
huddle in its warmth while the storms of winter pass,
awaiting a spring that will come as surely as the
steady passage of days.*

*~ from Safe Passages
by Molly Fumia*



"I Look to the Stars"



I look to the stars and I see you there.
It may seem that all that can be known of your life
Is a quick flash, just a small part of the excitement
and the confusion,
The certainty and the doubt that was once you.
But I know more. I know the bravest part of you,
The part that risked loving.
So when I look up to see you,
I have no doubt that at least
Your courage will shine forever.

(from Safe Passage by Molly Fumia)



I RESOLVE.....

I resolve to be better in this coming year...
The ache of my empty arms has given
way to quiet resignation.

I resolve to be better in this coming year...
I think of my children and smile;
I feel them hovering close and near.

I resolve to be better in this coming year...
I know I will never forget them;
I forgive those whose memories of
them are not so apparent to me;
I choose this because my children's
existence does not depend on others.

I resolve to be better in this coming year...
To be more caring, more compassionate,
more tolerant, more understanding;
I want to follow the path my life has taken
and still make a difference in other peoples' lives;
No other person can walk my path, feel my pain
or choose not to despair;
No other person can make me a better person.
Only I can do so.

I resolve to be better in the coming year...
I thank God for my husband, my family,
my friends and my children;
I thank God for the love I feel for each and
every one of them;
I thank God for the strangers who enter my
life with lessons for me to learn;
I thank God for new insights and memories
that do not fade;
I thank God for peace to the internal turmoil
I have felt.
I choose to give thanks for all I have,
Rather than despair over all that I've lost...

I resolve to be better in this coming year...

~ Sue Friedeck from *Sharing*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Jan/Feb 2000



There is nothing
nothing
easy about this thing called grief.
Nothing.
But I ask you to please
please
please
say yes
more often than you say no.
Say yes to you.
To possibility.
To hope.
To love.
To life.
To healing.
Please choose the light
more often than you choose the darkness.
Not that there aren't gifts in the darkness.
There are.
But it's often so much easier to find them
the gifts
in the light.
Do all you can to stay in the light.
Please remember that the person you loved
so
so
so dearly
lived.
Don't forget that.
He lived.
She lived.
Here with you.
And your relationship continues.
Always.
Don't be so overwhelmed
and paralyzed
and pissed off
that he died
that she died
that you spend most of your time
focusing on their death.
Focus on your life.
Together.
Say yes as often as you can.
Choose light as often as you can.
Remember that he lived as often as you can.
Don't lose her in the details of her death.
This thing called grief is hard
hard
hard work.
But you are stronger than you think.
There is a new way to do grief.

~ Tom Zuba
From my book *Permission to Mourn*
available at Amazon

The Compassionate Friends

Topeka Chapter, c/o Midland Hospice Care, Inc.
200 S.W. Frazier Circle, Topeka, KS 66606-2800

A self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings.

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TCF Credo

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends.
We reach out to each other with love, with understanding, and with hope.

The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them unites us.
Your pain becomes my pain, just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances.
We are a unique family because we represent many races, creeds, and relationships.
We are young, and we are old. Some of us are far along in our grief,
but others still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that they feel helpless and see no hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers.
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace.
But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share,
just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together.
We reach out to each other in love to share the pain as well as the joy, share the anger as well as the peace,
share the faith as well as the doubts, and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

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