



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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February

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Our Mission: 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.

Meetings

Our support group meetings are open to all bereaved parents, grandparents and mature siblings. Group participation is confidential and voluntary.

The Lehigh Valley chapter meets at Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville, PA the second Monday of the month at 7pm

For information about meetings, directions to our meeting space or to be added to the meeting text reminder list call or text 484-891-0823

Note: For the safety of all attendees

- Face masks are required for unvaccinated, optional for fully vaccinated.
- Please do not attend if you feel ill, were exposed to Covid, the Flu, or tested positive in the last 14 days

Next Meeting February 13

Note: If we need to cancel the meeting we will notify everyone on the text list and post the cancelation on our facebook page - facebook.com/TCFLehighValley

To Our New Members

Making the decision to come to your first meeting can be difficult. It can also be difficult to return for a second or third meeting, but we ask that you attend three meetings before deciding whether or not TCF will work for you. We cannot walk your grief journey for you, but we can walk beside you if you allow us to. We have no easy answers or quick fixes, but we care, share and understand. Although our circumstances may be different, we have all “been there”...we are all grieving the loss of a child and therefore we can truly say we understand. You are not alone.

Telephone Friends

Sometimes you may need to talk to someone who cares and understands between meetings. To help we maintain a list of telephone friends. During these times the following members are available to listen, share and offer what support they can.

Infant Loss - Kim Szep -	610-730-3111
Only Child - Shelly Garst -	484-241-5396
Addiction - Nancy Howe -	484-863-4324
Homicide - Ginger Renner -	610-967-5113



To volunteer as a telephone friend contact the newsletter editor

TCF National Support Resources

The TCF National website has over 35 private Facebook pages and a number of moderated chatrooms. To register for the FB pages or chat rooms go to www.compassionatefriends.org and click on the find support tab and then choose online communities.

Newsletter Notes

This Newsletter comes to you courtesy of The Compassionate Friends, Lehigh Valley Chapter. We hope that it will be of some comfort to you on your grief journey.

We welcome original stories and poetry from our members.

All submissions must include the author's name and your contact information. Send to the newsletter editor (address listed below)

If you move please contact the Newsletter Editor with your new address

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Am I Making Progress ??



January and February are months for making promises, commitments and resolutions (which are fancy promises). We begin our new year with high hopes, strong wills and long lists of things that will be different this year.

As we spend time looking back over the road we've traveled, sometimes we wonder if we have made any progress at all. In the beginning, we misplaced car keys, checkbooks, toothbrushes, relatives and important stuff like the TV Guide.

We had to begin making lists of everything. We simply couldn't remember anything. I couldn't remember my address, Social Security number, zip code or my mother-in-law's birthday. (I never could remember that.) I even started making lists of my lists! I knew I was going to be OK when I first discovered I could remember that I had made a list.

You know you're making progress when you can coordinate an entire outfit again. Shoes, belts, ties, purses, even sweaters and jackets-- often got left, simply because when we were hurting so terribly we couldn't think about what to wear. Many of us didn't even know that the pantyhose were on backwards or that the tie was crooked. If you are wearing matched shoes right now, then you are making progress.

You're making progress if you no longer choke back tears when you say your loved one's name. When you can walk down the cereal aisle in the supermarket and not dissolve into tears, progress is being made; When you can enjoy baking his or her favorite cookies or pie or cake again, you are on your way.

When you again can set the pictures out and wander through the scrapbooks - letting the smiles peek through the tears - hope is returning. When, for the most part, memories bring comfort and warmth instead of emptiness and pain, January grows softer. When you begin to understand that putting away your loved one's things does NOT mean putting him or her out of your life, your step becomes lighter.

Progress occurs when you completely understand that though your loved one died, the love you shared can never be destroyed. Hope begins to return when you can hear laughter again - and some of that laughter is your own.

Making progress through grief doesn't mean that we no longer miss

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Our Children Remembered

Please keep the parents, grandparents and siblings of the following children
in your thoughts and hearts

Birthdays and Anniversaries

	Birth	Anniv.
Gabriel Benner - Son of Baily Benner	May 4	Feb 9
Hope Davidson - Daughter of Dean and Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson	Aug 8	Feb 8
Eileen Collins Gant - Daughter of The Late John & Dorothy Collins; Sister of John, Steven, Kathleen & Brian Collins & MaryAnn Watkins	Mar 25	Feb 14
Robert Grozier, II - Son of Shirley Grozier; Brother of Laurie, Brenda & Vance	Feb 15	Jun 11
Brian Gum - Son of Geary and Brenda Gum	Feb 21	Mar 5
Heather Hawn - Daughter of Mike and Cathi Tirrell; Sister of Holli & Chad	Feb 25	Dec 25
David Heard - Son of Susan Heard; Brother of Daisy Heard	May 20	Feb 10
Matt Kush - Son of Rick and Ann Kush; Brother of Mike and Jenn	Aug 24	Feb 10
Ed McNally - Son of Don and Connie McNally; brother of Sean McNally	Jul 29	Feb 11
Michael Milot - Son of John and Patti Milot; Brother of Jill	Jun 30	Feb 2
Mardelle Parenti-Blume - Daughter of Brian and Nancy Kleckner	Feb 9	Mar 1
Eric Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Feb 15	May 20
Nicholas Savacool - Son of Howard and Laura Savacool; Brother of Brandon, Candace & Lacie	Feb 27	Apr 1
Constance Stewart - Daughter of Joanne Stewart; Sister of Keith Stewart & The Late Kevin J. Stewart	Sep 23	Feb 1
Stephanie Volkert - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zachary Volkert	Sep 22	Feb 12
Victoria Volkert - Daughter of Joanne Fimiano; Sister of Zacary Volkert	Jan 14	Feb 16



Love Gifts



Love Gifts enable us to reach out to newly bereaved and provide ongoing support to all members. They may be given in memory of a child or in memory or in honor of a friend or relative. Gifts are tax deductible.

Contributor	Loved One
♥ Rella Daniels	Jonelle Sisonick & Anthony Sisonick <i>All my love, Mom</i>

Donations & Contributions

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ <i>Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville, PA</i>
<i>For our meeting space</i> ★ <i>Giant Food Store Employees United Way Contributions</i>
<i>In Memory of David Todd Smith</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ <i>Aetna Payroll Contributors</i> ★ <i>United Way Payroll Contributors</i> ★ <i>The Matt Kush Foundation</i>
<i>In Memory of Matt Kush</i> |
|---|--|



Perhaps they are not the stars, but rather openings in Heaven where the love of our lost ones pours through and shines down upon us to let us know they are happy.

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our loved ones. They will be part of our lives forever, but their roles in our lives have changed. Our lifestyles and habits now reflect a different family landscape.

As we look back, it is amazing to see how the life fabric is no longer a gaping hole, torn apart. It's mended now with tiny stitches (perhaps a bit lumpy, like lots of us), patched with time, effort and love. Old threads and new threads have been rewoven and blended into a pattern not quite the same as we had originally planned. It is a tapestry of love given and received, love remembered and shared.

As the winter of our grief turns into spring, the renewed energy and love we feel becomes a memorial to our loved ones. Our tributes are not in the grave markers we decorate, not in the books we write, not in the speeches we give, they are in the love we share and pass on.

You know you are making progress when all of this begins to make some sense.

Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., CHT, CT, GMS

There's A Valentine Waiting For You

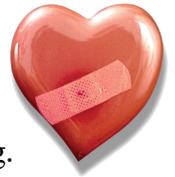
There's a Valentine waiting for you
That's different from all the others,
It's there every month at our meetings
Of heartbroken fathers and mothers.

Its envelope is made of caring
The glue of understanding seals it tight,
This non-judgmental group who's "been there"
Help to take away your fear and fright.

So, come join with us together,
Read your loving message printed clear,
In not only this month's valentine,
But all those throughout the year.

Mary Cleckley, TCF, Atlanta

The Mended Heart



The heart is, oh, so fragile;
although the muscle's strong.
It goes on beating even though
continued life seems wrong.

When devastation makes its mark
and chisels in the pain,
It seems as though the heart will not
ever know joy again.

Good News! the heart will mend itself,
but not just like before.
Remember, like a broken bone,
the original is no more.

There is a tender spot in both
where once the gap was wide.
The beating heart that gives us life
has courage on its side.

And as the broken bone may ache
because of rain or cold,
The heart may ache with longing for
the one whose bell has tolled.

There is no guarantee that life
will ever be the same,
But when you do find joy in life,
the heart should feel no shame.

Koran Longbrake
TCF Hardin County, OH

Welcome Groundhog Day



According to folklore, every year on February 2nd, a groundhog named Punxsutawney Phil, in a little town by the same name in Pennsylvania, wakes from his winter slumber, rises from his cozy little burrow and gazes about at his surroundings. Legend has it that if he doesn't see his shadow, he shakes himself off and ventures out to welcome an early spring. If he sees his shadow, he becomes frightened and quickly retreats down his hole to safety where he goes back to sleep and the winter weather continues.

When we lose a child, we seem to linger in a perpetual winter. For a very long time we see our world as a barren winter landscape. The warmth and love that our children brought to our hearts has been ripped away by their death and we're left with a cold aching void. We are a little like Punxsutawney Phil. We might be afraid to come to our first Compassionate Friends meeting. We may want to hide from the world and stay in our burrows. But if we are very brave and come to a meeting, we will meet others who have survived the long cold winter of their hearts. We gather to share our stories, support each other, love each other and very slowly we begin to and rejoin life as best we can. Remember, we need not walk alone.

Janet G. Reyes,
TCF Alamo Area Chapter, San Antonio, TX

A Poem For My Friends

I asked you not to grieve with me
For my loss you cannot know.
And please don't tell me how you understand
But this is just how some things go.

I ask you not to know my pain
Or tell me it was God's will.
And please don't tell me how another child
Will my ache and my need fulfill.

There are times when words are void of meaning
There is nothing that anyone can say.
Just hold my hand and sit with me
Till I can cope in a better way.

Pray for me and the child we lost
Help me believe in a better day.
Help me to hope and to somehow know
I'll survive this all some way.

And when I mention Lindsay's name
Please try not to look ashamed.
For I loved her more than life itself
And I will always speak her name.

Do not tell me it should be over now
And we cannot change the past.
You can't understand my friend,
This grief does not leave when asked

Just bear with me, in my grief
And the turmoil of my mind
And pray that on some future day
I'll comfort you in kind



Look for us on the Web



- ♥ Visit our web page at www.lehighvalleytcf.org for group information, past and present newsletters & helpful links
- ♥ Like and Follow our facebook page: www.facebook.com/TCFLehighValley for meeting reminders, cancelations, announcements, meaningful posts .
- ♥ Find us on Pinterest under the keyword **The Compassionate Friends, Lehigh Valley Chapter**

Waiting for Answers

Years ago I left my first meeting of The Compassionate Friends and drove home in tears. My son, Max, had died a few short weeks before and I had been anxiously awaiting this evening. These people must have some answers, I thought. With paper and pen in purse, I was ready to take notes and do as they prescribed. I would do anything to ease the ache in my soul.

But when I walked out into the spring air later that night, I felt betrayed. I hadn't heard any answers. Instead of learning how to leave my grief behind, it had been confirmed, made more real with expression. I knew I would miss Max forever. Now I wondered if I would grieve forever. Would it always be this way, a flash of pain aligned with every memory?

During the next months and years, I attended TCF meetings and conferences, read books, raged, kept busy, sometimes spent the day in bed. I wrote, cried and talked about Max. Slowly, I discovered the answers I had long feared were true: yes, I will grieve forever, and yes, my memories will often provoke tears. But something had changed.

My grief was now more forgiving, my tears almost sweet with memory. Max's life took shape again as the anguish of his death began to recede. If I would always miss him, I would also always have him with me in so many ways. I wanted to carry his memory into the future: the joy, the lessons, and the inevitable pain. How could I do otherwise?

As I walked to my car after that first meeting, the TCF chapter leader caught up with me. "How can I stop this pain?" I asked. She put her arm on my shoulder. "Just do what feels right to you," she said, "Listen to your heart. And we'll be here to listen, too."

Sometimes the best advice is none at all.

Mary Clark
TCF Sugar Land, SW Houston Chapter, TX

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 and 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 resurface 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 a normal part 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 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 shadow, it is time to begin the 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 a physical as well as psychological stress. Your body needs protection.

Be patient. Wanting to live again and learning to live again take time. The path out 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.

Bronna Romao, Ph.D., TCF Albany, NY

Sibling Page

Brother-Sister Bond Showed Itself on Valentine's Day

A couple of years after my son Michael died, I was sorting through some things which I had saved from our children's school years. I came across a Valentine card which depicts a little girl surrounded by heart symbols. "Stuck on you Valentine!" the card reads. On the back of the card is seven-year-old Michael's hand-written signature. The card was to his big sister Kelly.

The emotional bond between Kelly and Michael was formed very early. Almost three years older, Kelly was excited about the prospect of welcoming her new brother into the world. When I was pregnant with Michael, we didn't know the baby's gender in advance. "It's not a girl," Kelly had insisted. "He's my brother, and his name is Michael!"

The relationship between our two children was not unlike that of many other healthy siblings. Kelly and Michael were daily companions and playmates during the early years. They had their bouts of sibling rivalry, too, which on some days would drive me insane! Their love for each other was solid, however. On one particular evening, after a day of almost non-stop arguing between the two of them, while they were lying in their beds I heard, "Night Mike, I love you!" "Night Kelly, I love you!"

At age 19, Michael died in an automobile accident while Kelly was away at college. Kelly has had to learn how to be an only child. She has had to define for herself a new identity, a difficult task as a young adult. I am confident that the bond which was formed between them will remain forever.

Kelly is married and shares her new home with her husband and an adorable Pug named Otto. They occasionally spend a weekend at our house and sleep in Kelly's old bedroom, where Michael's "Stuck on you Valentine!" card can still be found on the night stand as a symbol of a bond that will never die.

Anne Dionne - TCF Online Community Services

The Bitter Tears of Love Lost

Because of my status in society
I can look below to poverty
and realize no matter how frustrated I get,
I will always be very lucky to have a family
who loves and cares for me.

But still the tears roll down my face
and my cheeks are forever stained
because I know as long as I live
my heart will always be pained.

I was left in shock, pain, and fear,
left with your unspoken words which I will never hear
But in my days of sorrow when I feel that I will fall
I can only repeat the phrase to myself,
"It is better to have loved and lost
than to never have loved at all."

Peter Smith , Unknown Chapter
In Memory of my brother, Gregory Smith

Did you know that The Compassionate Friends hosts a chatroom and a facebook page just for bereaved siblings?

To join go to
www.compassionatefriends.org
and click on the "Find Support"
menu. There you will find options for moderated chatrooms and private facebook pages and information on how to join.



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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.

Other Local TCF Chapters & Support Groups

TCF Carbon County - 484-719-6753

TCF Easton - 610-515-3526

TCF Quakertown - 215-703-8431

GRASP (grief recovery after substance passing)

TCF Pocono - 570 - 350 - 6695

(484) 788-9440

Love Gift Form

Your love gift will help defray the cost of chapter expenses such as the newsletter mailings, meetings and our outreach to the newly bereaved. The Compassionate Friends is a 501c(3) non-profit organization and your donations are fully tax deductible.

Deadlines are the 1st of the month previous to the month you wish publication in. Example the deadline for publication in January is December the 1st

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Contributor Name *(this will be the name that appears in the newsletter)*

Address

Phone

Email Address

I would like to make a donation of _____ In Memory of In Honor of A Chapter Gift *(without memorial or honorarium)*

Name of person gift given for

Edition to be published in. *Deadlines listed above. Late submissions or those that do not indicate an edition will be published in the next edition.*

Special Text - Brief Messages Please. *Poems & story submissions are always welcome and should be sent directly to the Newsletter Editor for inclusion in the newsletter.*

Please designate which of the following your gift is for (you may circle more than one)

Newsletter Expenses

Postage

Office Expenses

Outreach Program

Special Events