



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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April

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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 April 10

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

Newsletter Editor Contact

- by mail:
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Parenting Through a Glass Partition: After the Death of a Child

Raising children and being bereaved makes me feel like I did when I was six years old. My red tights bagged around my ankles, I often had doggy poop on the bottom of my scuffed patent-leather shoes, and I was constantly running to catch the bus. Now, as a mother of three living children and one who died, I feel overwhelmed, forgetful and, to use a word my aunt Mollie often said, discombobulated.

At the fast food restaurant, my children laugh in the play area as I sit drinking coffee behind the glass partition that separates the play area from the dining section. While I have hugged them so tightly their tonsils could pop out, I am still, much of the time, finding myself watching them from a distance. They are mine but so was Daniel, and in the course of a moment I know they could be gone, as he is.

When Rachel, 11, was late coming home from a shopping trip with her grandmother, I thought they had been tied up in traffic, but then my mind leaped off into an insane spin and I was certain she'd been in an accident. My thoughts dove into planning her funeral.

She came home without a scratch, and I gulped my worries away, for the moment.

When my children say, "I love you, Mom," and spontaneously wrap their arms around me, I'm certain this could be the end.

"So you live in fear?" a friend asks. Well, no. I live in reality. My reality is hearing my children call "Hi, Daniel" when we drive on Interstate 40 near Exit 270, where there's a view of Daniel's Place, what my children have named the cemetery. Ben, at five, older than his older brother ever got to be, asks which of our toys Daniel liked to play with and with a smile on his face, listens as I share a story about Daniel and the Fisher Price fishing rod. Elizabeth, age four, tells me out of the blue that Daniel isn't dead; he lives with God. Later, she hugs me and says she wishes Daniel was here. She's never been photographed with her oldest brother. She kicked in the womb as Daniel breathed his last. Three months later, this failed vasectomy child was born. I was certain she'd be severely traumatized. But so far, at age four, she has only been known to tell the neighbor girl she doesn't like her.

My reality is that a part of my heart wanted to be childless when Daniel died so that I could have time to weep and wail without having to meet the demands of exasperated cries, without having to wipe little bottoms and without having to search for tiny shoes and socks. When infant Liz used to wake crying months after Daniel's death, I'd hold her and we'd sob together.

The hole in my heart looms large today. The new school year and Daniel's birthday are just around the corner. I finish my coffee and tell my kids it's time to attend the Open House. While grinning at my children and me, a friend exclaims, "One in middle school, one in

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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.
Patricia Arey - Daughter of Elizabeth & the late William Arey; Sister of Elizabeth Ann, Barbara, Rose Marie & Elaine	Apr 18	May 8
Holly Cavanaugh - Daughter of Bill Cavanaugh; Sister of Bo Cavanaugh	Apr 27	Sep 25
Edward Gaydos, III - Son of Edward & Sally Gaydos; Brother of Blasias Gaydos	Apr 23	Apr 8
Elizabeth Gibson, MD - Daughter of Richard J. Brown & The Late Marilyn Brown; Sister of Margaret Nahrman & Eric Brown	Jun 15	Apr 2
David Hoagland, Jr - Son of Gypsy Garrett	Sep 24	Apr 26
Richard "Rich" Hollabaugh - Son of Linda Hollabaugh & the late Wayne Hollabaugh	Dec 20	Apr 10
James "Jimmy" Hotz - Son of Elizabeth Hotz	Apr 24	Jul 4
Zaine Krluc - Son of Ramiz & Merima Krluc	Apr 10	Jun 12
Robert Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Jul 9	Apr 4
Nicholas Savacool - Son of Howard & Laura Savacool; Brother of Brandon, Candace & Lacie	Feb 27	Apr 1
Benjamin Steinert - Son of MaryAnne Steinert	Aug 1	Apr 9
Sean Virmalo - Son of Udo & Janet L. Virmalo; Brother of Eric, Brett & Katelyn Virmalo	Sep 13	Apr 28



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

♥ Udo and Janet Virmalo **Sean Mikhail Virmalo**
Always with us. Udo, Janet, Eric, Brett & Katelyn

Donations & Contributions

★ **Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville, PA**
For our meeting space

★ **Giant Food Store Employees United Way Contributions**
In Memory of David Todd Smith

★ **Aetna Payroll Contributors**

★ **United Way Payroll Contributors**

★ **The Matt Kush Foundation**
In Memory of Matt Kush



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**

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kindergarten, and one in preschool! You will be busy." I paste on a phony smile and think, Not busy enough. I need my fourth grader. But Daniel, my would-be-nine-year-old, died four years ago before completing a year of pre-school.

When we arrive home from the Open House, Ben trips onto the pavement while playing ball and I hold him as he cries and his knee bleeds. Whispering, I assure him, "It is going to be okay." What a luxury to be able to tell my children this line of comfort. For Daniel, with the cancer treatments he had to go through, it was not "okay." Although I prayed daily he'd be cured, it was beyond my control. A scraped knee will heal.

How do we do it? How do we continue living the role of the nurturing and loving parent with the enormous responsibilities, when at times, we can barely put one foot in front of the other?

Here are some tips that have worked for fellow bereaved parents and me:

- Take breaks. This is easier said than done, I know. But I believe you need more breaks than before the death of your child. Your energy for living has been depleted. If you're home all day with the demands of little ones as I have been, you need time alone. If your spouse is at home all day with the children, he or she needs a break.
- Let anger out in a constructive way. When you find you're constantly yelling at the kids, it's time to figure out another release for anger. Play basketball, go on a walk or bike ride. Shut yourself in a room and write. Use your pent up frustration to pull weeds in the garden or sweep the garage.
- Learn to apologize, often. When you do find yourself unreasonably upset with your children, apologize for your reactions. Grief can make you irrational.
- Hug your kids more, even if the older ones whine and don't want you to. They know now as we do how important hugs and showing our affection real. Talk it out. Tell your children why you are feeling sad or discouraged. If you're having a frustrating day, let them know. Even my little ones could understand that "Mommy or Daddy is sad because she & he misses Daniel."
- Spend time with kids, one on one, if possible. Just

you and your daughter can go shopping or out for ice cream. Don't force talk of her dead brother or sister. Just be together for the sake of spending time together. We focus a lot on our deceased children; our living children need to feel valued, too.

- Don't stifle your children as they grow and grieve in their own ways.
- Write love letters to your surviving children. Sometimes it is easier to convey feelings on paper. Give the letters to your kids or keep them to reread later.
- Share your child who died. He is a part of the family and his story needs to be told.

Don't fear your "glass partition" view of parenting. As with the other phases and experiences of grief, honor it, and don't fight it. You are modeling survival. Even as your tears flow and you are overcome with sorrow, your children can learn this is okay. They will also reflect (although it may be years later) that Mom got out of bed, made us breakfast, shopped for school supplies, and went to our soccer games even when she didn't feel like it. They will learn life is tough and even when the storms hit the hardest, it is possible to live through them.

Believe your surviving children will be all right even as they see you suffering and as they face their own monumental pain. In time, they may learn a deeper sensitivity. Perhaps they will become more compassionate because of their experiences. You can guarantee they're more realistic. Your son or daughter might even become a winner of the Noble Peace Prize. (We can still dream, can't we?)

I have to remember that although once laid-back, I was never the perfect parent before Daniel died. I had vices and virtues then, just as I have now. Perhaps grief has helped us become better aware of what we are all about. Listen. There are many negatives, but there is much to smile about now, too. Devotion made us caring and loving parents before, and it can carry us through during this rocky road of bereavement. There is the ability to parent effectively through the glass partition.

Alice J. Wisler

TCF, Wake County, NC In Memory of Daniel

Spring Holidays

Easter signifies the Risen Christ, The most hopeful and positive symbol of Christendom, and the Jewish Passover celebrates escape from oppression and slavery into the Promised Land. These holidays have not become burdened with required gift-giving, home decorating and lavish partying.

As winter ends and the trees, shrubs and flowers of our valley burst into bloom, many bereaved parents feel their spirits lift a little bit, and the pall of gloom subsides for many. Some of our parents, in fact, leap into spring by planting a memorial garden for their child, which gives them something positive to do, and provides them with the pleasure of creating a little spot of beauty for them and their family and friends to enjoy. The exercise and getting out into these rare and beautiful spring days are an added health bonus. And to have flowers from your child's garden to bring inside to brighten your kitchen soon gives a special joy.

Whatever the approaching religious season holds for you, pitch in and welcome it! And don't forget the power of flowers...especially a spot of your own creation!

Jackie Rohr, TCF, Ventura, CA



A Prayer for Spring

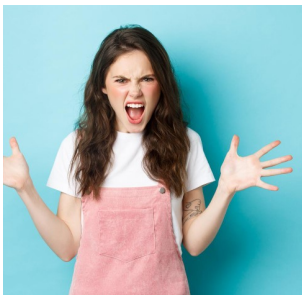
Like Springtime, let me unfold
and grow fresh and anew,
from this cocoon of grief
that has been spun around me.

Help me face the harsh reality of
sunshine and renewed life,
as my bones still creak
from the winter of my grief.

Life has dared to go on around me.
And as I recover from the insult
of life's continuance,
I readjust my focus to include recovery
and growth as a possibility in my future.

Give me strength to break out of
the cocoon of my grief.
But may I never forget it is the place
where I grew my wings,
becoming a new person because of my loss.

Janis Heil, unknown chapter



The Irritability of Grief

As much as I have read about grief, I don't think I've read anything about how irritable it makes me. I'm guessing I'm not alone. I am short tempered, easily annoyed, and just generally uncomfortable in my own skin. There seem to be many contributing factors. First, even after four and a half years, I often do not sleep well. I go to bed too early, probably, because often I'm just "done" with the day and want it to be over. Then, I wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep because I ruminate over and over about Jordan's death, all the circumstances surrounding it, all the difficulties since. I wish my mind had an "off switch." I could sure use one.

Next, my chest still hurts. Not as much of the time as it used to, but still often enough to bother me. There is an elephant who has planted its foot upon my chest.

Third, it takes a lot of energy to put on the mask I wear so that I can maneuver about in the world. The mask that smiles at the good news of others, the time they have with their intact families, the joys and challenges that come with an ordinary life. The kind of life I used to have.

There are fifty-five conditions listed on Wikipedia that can cause irritability. Grief isn't one of them. Insomnia and sleep deprivation are. I think grief should be there too.

I find exercise makes it better as does a dose of sunshine. Having a dog helps, especially a dog who "has issues." Also, I'm not irritable when I am engaged in trying to be helpful to someone else. So I try to do more of that. But I am still irritable. Grief just makes me irritable.

Peggi Johnson TCF Piedmont Chapter, VA

Image: Freepik.com

Finding Our People

It's Spring Again. A season that always brings me back to the beginning. I watch now, with a combination of delightful anticipation and sadness, as tiny buds appear on trees and little sprouts of green struggle to break the surface of my garden. Everything comes back I think - except Peter. It's always in the Spring, along with the tulips and daffodils, that the emotions lurking just below the surface seem to want to break through my skin.

I remember clearly what it was like in those early years. The pain that was not like anything else I had ever felt, heard about, or read about. The frustration of not being able to describe what was happening, what I was feeling. I felt as though I was trapped in my own mind, unable to speak as the world tried to convince me that they understood and sympathized. I was flailing around, angry at everything and increasingly furious that in spite of their entreaties, nobody "got it" - nobody who had ever suffered could imagine what my reality was like. I felt so isolated and alone, stripped of any purpose or reason to go on without my beloved Peter.

The only company I had then was my journal. I could blabber into my journal at will. Into it I vented all my pain, my suffering, and my frustration at never having the adequate words to describe what I was feeling. Then one day, I came to a Compassionate Friends meeting. I felt as if I had been on a frozen planet, alone and afraid, and had come upon a campfire with a circle of knowing, understanding sufferers just like me. They knew nothing about me - only that I had experienced the unthinkable - just as they had. They made no attempt to comfort me with empty words. Silently, they hugged me and shared their own pain while they nodded their understanding. And I knew they knew. As my young friend Marilyn said recently - I had found 'my people'.

Knowing that no one who hasn't survived this kind of catastrophe can possibly "get it", we are so fortunate to live in a time when "our people" can be

found sitting together in a circle of friendship at a Compassionate Friends meeting, ready to welcome newcomers and offer a nod of understanding - not requiring any explanations or descriptions of this pain that has no words because they do indeed, "get it".

My compassionate friends have given my life new purpose. They have allowed me to keep Peter in this world. The memorials - the scholarships, the gardens, the park benches, the animal shelter that bears his name - all wonderful. But it is my compassionate friends that make Peter's memory come alive. It is a gift you keep on giving. And I am so grateful.

*Marie Levine
TCF, Manhatten, NY*

A Lesson in Grammar

Mary Cleckley
TCF Atlanta, GA

If you are like me . . .
I don't want anybody
to quibble with me about
Whether my son's birthday
is or was
November 20,
because
a) it is,
b) it was, and
c) it always be.

And,
as to whether I have or had
two children . . .
Because
a) I do,
b) I did, and
c) I always will have

Sibling Page

When You Stop Asking Why

All these emotions, change by the moment.
 Stuck in time, inside my mind.
 Shifting tides changed my life.
 Tore me apart, and broke my heart.
 But when you stop asking why,
 Then you can start to say goodbye.
 The pain will only hold you there,
 And never get you anywhere.
 And so I must go on with life.
 That I cannot sacrifice.
 And I will hold you in my heart,
 As I make this brand-new start.
 Precious memories, can [take them with me?
 Oh, they hurt, oh so deeply.
 But they were true, and they were mine.
 And I can't erase time.
 Can't change the past to ease the pain,
 And so they must always remain.
 And when you stop asking why,
 Then you can start to say goodbye.
 The pain will only hold you there,
 And never get you anywhere.
 And so I must go on with life.
 That I cannot sacrifice.
 And I will hold you in my heart,
 As I make this brand-new start.
 Curtains open,
 I step forward.
 Take a breath, to see what's left.
 Arms wide open,
 No more trembling.
 Brace my heart, for this new start.
 And when you stop asking why,
 Then you can start to say goodbye.
 The pain will only hold you there,
 And never get you anywhere.
 And so I must go on with life.
 That I cannot sacrifice.
 And will hold you in my heart,
 As I make this brand-new start.

Tonya Thompson

*in honor of my older brother, Randal Wagoner Jr.,
 We Need Not Walk Alone Winter 2011/Spring 2012*

Unanswered Questions

You left us so suddenly that I think most of us just felt shock. Did you know of everyone's love for you? We used to have lots of fun playing basketball, talking about diesel trucks and dragsters, and playing videos. You lived for scouting, you lived for animals and nature - you lived for us all. I got to know your corny jokes, your adolescent fears (although for you they were understandably real), the simplest way with which you saw life, the joy you placed in other's hearts.

How could it be that you're gone now while others seemingly less deserving live on? I'm not sure. Life isn't fair - everyone has said it - but why? Why does the sun rise? Why are we here? What is the purpose of life? I haven't been alive very long, but the only response I can come up with is love. Love has to be the answer to this question.

I love you. We all love you. We shall meet again someday, and that day will be a day of joy for me, a day that we shall again be companions. By that time, we will have a lot to share. It already seems a lifetime since you've gone. So it goes.

We live, we love, we learn. Our biggest task to learn is to let you go and never Forget.

Scott T. Anderson, TCF/Omaha, NE

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.



The Compassionate Friends Credo Copyright © 2007

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

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

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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