



The Compassionate Friends

Lehigh Valley Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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July

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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 July 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

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Summer Time, Vacation Time, Family Time

I'll bet you never dreamed that there would ever be a time in your life when you would not welcome vacation from work...and the day-to-day hassles of routine living. It's probably a shocker to you that the slow pace of summer, cookouts, softball games, etc., are now a nightmare. Everywhere we go, there are kids out of school enjoying their leisure time, and our bodies jolt as we search for our own absent child who enjoyed this time of the year with a passion!

Surrounded by summer fun, a bereaved parent needs only look around and there are painful memories at every corner. When we are faced with all the living, loving, happy families with their children, the anger boils within and we feel very cheated. And this year we are afraid to go back to the beach cottage we've visited every year, or to the favorite mountain retreat where we laid around for a week and relaxed, or the amusement park where the kids had to ride every ride and see every attraction, no matter what the temperature was. Yes, fear of our memories, fear of too much time to think, fear of too many kids, fear of bursting inside from our pain...all of these feelings are part of the first few years of summer vacations for bereaved parents.

It's been nine years now for me, and I need to tell you that it will get easier, but I found that for the first few years I needed to consciously change some of my routines in order to deal with my fears. I could not visit the same places we had visited when Todd was with us. We tried new experiences in new places with new people. That isn't to say there weren't some downtimes; however, the faster paced vacations worked better for us. I could not allow myself too much time to think. I enjoy those weekends away now, but for the first few summers I had to dig in the yard, repaint lawn furniture, rearrange the garage, and the multitude of busy projects we'd been putting off for the lack of time. That was a better vacation for me than forcing myself to go somewhere and feel miserable.

You've read it a hundred different times, you have to find your own way and your own peace - leave yourself room to escape if it becomes necessary. If you can find any enjoyment and relaxation, relish it.. you deserve it, and it does not mean you don't care. It simply means you are healing. Now I walk down the beach and enjoy the solitude, or laugh when I see a toddler, or listen to the joy of kids laughing, and it warms my heart. Yes I miss him, but I know he enjoyed every minute of this season, and I know that's what he'd want for me... and thank God, I can do it once more!

Brenda Holanct TCF, Concord, NC

July is Bereaved Parents Awareness Month. It is dedicated to raising awareness about the grief parents go through after the loss of a child and the support needed to navigate this unimaginable grief. The following article eloquently illustrates the grief of bereaved parents.

7 THINGS I HAVE LEARNED SINCE THE LOSS OF MY CHILD

Child loss is a loss like no other. One often misunderstood by many. If you love a bereaved parent or know someone who does, remember that even his or her “good” days are harder than you could ever imagine. Compassion and love, not advice, are needed. If you’d like an inside look into why the loss of a child is a grief that lasts a lifetime, here is what I’ve learned in my seven years of trekking through the unimaginable.

1). Love never dies.

There will never come a day, hour, minute or second I stop loving or thinking about my son. Just as parents of living children unconditionally love their children always and forever, so do bereaved parents. I want to say and hear his name just the same as non-bereaved parents do. I want to speak about my deceased children as normally and naturally as you speak of your living ones.

I love my child just as much as you love yours - the only difference is mine lives in heaven and talking about him is unfortunately quite taboo in our culture. I hope to change that. Our culture isn’t so great about hearing about children gone too soon, but that doesn’t stop me from saying my son’s name and sharing his love and light everywhere I go. Just because it might make you uncomfortable, doesn’t make him matter any less. My son’s life was cut irreversibly short, but his love lives on forever. And ever.

2). Bereaved parents share an unspeakable bond.

In my seven years navigating the world as a bereaved parent, I am continually struck by the power of the bond between bereaved parents. Strangers become kindreds in mere seconds - a look, a glance, a knowing of the heart connects us, even if we’ve never met before. No matter our circumstances, who we are, or how different we are, there is no greater bond than the connection between parents who understand the agony of enduring the death of a child. It’s a pain we suffer for a lifetime, and unfortunately only those who have walked the path of child loss understand the depth and breadth of both the pain and the love we carry.

3). I will grieve for a lifetime.

Period. The end. There is no “moving on,” or “getting over it.” There is no bow, no fix, no solution to my heartache. There is no end to the ways I will grieve and for how long I will grieve. There is no glue for my broken heart, no elixir for my pain, no going back in time. For as long as I breathe, I will grieve and ache and love my son with all my heart and soul. There will never come a time where I won’t think about who my son would be, what he would look like, and how he would be woven perfectly into the tapestry of my family. I wish people could understand that grief lasts forever because love lasts forever; that the loss of a child is not one finite event, it is a continuous loss that unfolds minute by minute over the course of a lifetime. Every missed birthday, holiday, milestone— should-be back-to-school school years and graduations; weddings that will never be; grandchildren that should have been but will never be born—an entire generation of people are irrevocably altered forever.

This is why grief lasts forever. The ripple effect lasts forever. The bleeding never stops.

4). It’s a club I can never leave, but is filled with the most shining souls I’ve ever known.

This crappy club called child loss is a club I never wanted to join, and one I can never leave, yet is filled with some of the best people I’ve ever known. And yet we all wish we could jump ship - that we could have met another way - any other way but this. Alas, these shining souls are the most beautiful, compassionate, grounded, loving, movers, shakers and healers I have ever had the honor of knowing. They are life-changers, game-changers, relentless survivors and thrivers. Warrior moms and dads who redefine the word brave.

Every day loss parents move mountains in honor of their children gone too soon. They start movements, change laws, spearhead crusades of tireless activism. Why? In the hope that even just one parent could be spared from joining the club. If you’ve ever wondered who some of the greatest world

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changers are, hang out with a few bereaved parents and watch how they live, see what they do in a day, a week, a lifetime. Watch how they alchemize their grief into a force to be reckoned with, watch how they turn tragedy into transformation, loss into legacy.

Love is the most powerful force on earth, and the love between a bereaved parent and his/her child is a life force to behold. Get to know a bereaved parent. You'll be thankful you did.

5). The empty chair/room/space never becomes less empty.

Empty chair, empty room, empty space in every family picture. Empty, vacant, forever gone for this lifetime. Empty spaces that should be full, everywhere we go. There is and will always be a missing space in our lives, our families, a forever-hole-in-our-hearts. Time does not make the space less empty. Neither do platitudes, clichés or well-wishes for us to "move on," or "stop dwelling," from well intentioned friends or family. Nothing does. No matter how you look at it, empty is still empty. Missing is still missing. Gone is still gone. The problem is nothing can fill it. Minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, month after month, year after heartbreaking year the empty space remains.

The empty space of our missing child(ren) lasts a lifetime. And so we rightfully miss them forever. Help us by holding the space of that truth for us.

6). No matter how long it's been, holidays never become easier without my son.

Never, ever. Have you ever wondered why every holiday season is like torture for a bereaved parent? Even if it's been 5, 10, or 25 years later? It's because they really, truly are. Imagine if you had to live every holiday without one or more of your precious children. Imagine how that might feel for you. It would be easier to lose an arm, a leg or two - anything - than to live without your flesh and blood, without the beat of your heart. Almost anything would be easier than living without one of more of your precious children. That is why holidays are always and forever hard for bereaved parents. Don't wonder why or even try to understand. Know you don't have to understand in order to be a supportive presence. Consider supporting and loving some bereaved parents this holiday season. It will be the best gift you could ever give them.

7). Because I know deep sorrow, I also know

unspeakable joy.

Though I will grieve the death of my son forever and then some, it does not mean my life is lacking happiness and joy. Quite the contrary, in fact, though it took awhile to get there. It is not either/or, it's both/and. My life is more rich now. I live from a deeper place. I love deeper still. Because I grieve I also know a joy like no other. The joy I experience now is far deeper and more intense than the joy I experienced before my loss. Such is the alchemy of grief.

Because I've clawed my way from the depth of unimaginable pain, suffering and sorrow, again and again— when the joy comes, however and whenever it does— it is a joy that reverberates through every pore of my skin and every bone in my body. I feel all of it, deeply: the love, the grief, the joy, the pain. I embrace and thank every morsel of it. My life now is more rich and vibrant and full, not despite my loss, but because of it. In grief there are gifts, sometimes many. These gifts don't in any way make it all "worth" it, but I am grateful beyond words for each and every gift that comes my way. I bow my head to each one and say thank you, thank you, thank you. Because there is nothing - and I mean absolutely nothing - I take for granted. Living life in this way gives me greater joy than I've ever known possible.

I have my son to thank for that. Being his mom is the best gift I've ever been given. Even death can't take that away.

Angela Miller

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*Angela Miller is an internationally known writer and speaker on grief and loss. She is the best selling author of *You Are the Mother of All Mothers* and founder of the award-winning grief organization *A Bed For My Heart*. After the death of her son, Angela founded *A Bed For My Heart* in 2013, and has given people around the world a compassionate and supportive community to express their grief and honor their children. Her work has been featured in *People*, *Psychology Today*, *Huffington Post*, *BlogTalk Radio*, and more.*

Our Children Remembered

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

Birthdays and Anniversaries

	Birth	Anniv.
Hunter Bremmer - Son of David Bremmer ; Brother of Heather Bremmer	Dec 12	Jul 27
Joseph Chanitz - Son of Jay and Ruth Chanitz	Jul 16	Aug 28
Courtney Daud - Daughter of Marie Daud	Jul 15	Jul 15
Sarah Davidson - Daughter of Dean and Donna Davidson; Sister of Nicholas Davidson	Jul 10	Jul 10
Denise Deiter - Sister of Cheryl A. McCue & the late Cathy A. Mertz	Jul 3	Jun 11
Mark Dilts, Jr - Son of Mark and Joy Dilts; Brother of Beth Dilts	Jan 6	Jul 8
Sgt. Christopher Geiger - Son of George and Patricia Geiger; Brother of Roseanne Reenock, Michael, Terrance, David & Timothy Geiger	Mar 30	Jul 9
Eric Graver - Son of Mary L Graver	Aug 17	Jul 9
Chase Groeger - Son of Rich and Amy Herman; Brother of Daisha Hamilton	Nov 23	Jul 16
James "Jimmy" Hotz - Son of Elizabeth Hotz	Apr 24	Jul 4
Colleen Kilker - Daughter of Mark and Kathleen Kilker; Sister of Meghan, Bridget and Mark Kilker	May 6	Jul 23
David Kunsman - Son of Charles and Joan Kunsman; Brother of Sherry Flanagan, Sandra Kunsman, the late Walter Alfonso & the late Charles Kunsman, Jr	May 2	Jul 15
John Leonard, Jr - Son of Jack and Jule Leonard; Brother of Karen	Jul 27	Jan 6
Ed McNally - Son of Don and Connie McNally; brother of Sean McNally	Jul 29	Feb 11
Peter Radocha - Son of Lucille Radocha; Brother of Gina Sacco & Frank Radocha, Jr	Jun 13	Jul 1
Robert Rute - Son of Linda Cavanaugh	Jul 9	Apr 4
Paul Woodling - Son of Gregg and Mary Ann Miller	Jul 21	Nov 5



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.

No Love Gifts this month

Donations & Contributions

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

★ **Aetna Payroll Contributors**

★ **United Way Payroll Contributors**

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

★ **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

Memorial Garden News

The engraved pavers and TCF logo are now in place at the memorial garden at the Charles Chris Community Center in Palmer Township.



The Grand Finale

It's getting late...
And dusk is setting in...
The 4th of July fireworks...
Are about to begin.

I wonder how far is Heaven...
As I look up to the night sky...
And wonder if my child is watching...
Just from the other side?

The Fireworks have begun...
As they fly into the sky...
Just like my child, my angel...
Who is forever soaring high.

The colorful bursts explode...
Into a spectacular show of lights....
And fill the heavens above...
Its so beautiful and bright.

And as the fireworks fall...
From the Heavens way up high...
They burn out and it's dark again...
And the crowd lets out a sigh.

But then another is lit...sparking brilliantly...
As the light trails through the night's sky...
I think I am beginning to understand...
For it's the same when our loved one dies.

For a life that has burned brightly...
Can never fade away...
For it's rekindled through our memories...
Each and every day.

So even though my child is gone...
To the Heavens up above...
Their light will always remain...
shine down on me with love.

And our Grand Finale will come...
When we are reunited in Heaven again...
But their life will always remain lit...
...Until then.

*Laura/Heavenly Lights Children Memorial TCF/
South Shore Chapter Hingham, MA*

To a Compassionate Friend

THEY told me life never gives you more than you can handle. ***Lies, I can't handle this!***

THEY told me, in a year I would be my old "self" again, ***they were wrong, "it" died with my son.***

THEY told me to get my act together and start living again, ***all I see is his death.***

THEY said, if I was a true believer, this would be a time of joyous celebration. ***Damn them! I couldn't give him life, now I can't give him heaven.***

YOU didn't say, "You'll handle this, you're strong." ***You said, "go ahead and cry. I'll wait until you're ready."***

YOU didn't say I'd be my old self again. ***You said, Your old self died too. You helped me find my new self***

YOU didn't tell me to get my act together. ***You said, "Take things slowly, a day at a time. The pieces will fit when you're ready."***

YOU saw that my faith was shaken, ***You didn't preach. You reminded me that He in whom I believe is patient and understanding. His love would preserve until I found my way back.***

Thank you, Friend, for showing me Compassion.
Perhaps I can do for someone what you have done for me.

Edith Fraser, TCF, Winnipeg Canada

Permission to Be Crazy

It's OK to do strange things, anything that gives your heart a sense of peace, as long as you don't hurt anyone. Whether you're running down the beach, standing in the shower, or riding in your car screaming at the top of your lungs, releasing balloons with notes attached, talking to an empty chair, wearing their clothes, baking a cake for their birthday, signing their name on cards, decorating their grave with things they loved, or collecting angels in their memory - it's OK. No excuses are necessary. You have learned to do what your heart needs, and that is a big step.

Elaine F. Stillwell, MA, MS

Sibling Page

Questions & Answers from Bereaved Siblings

All of a sudden I burst into tears and cannot control my crying.

You have the freedom to cry when you need to. Crying is a normal reaction. You may feel embarrassed, but most people will react with sympathy and wish for themselves that they could cry freely. Crying is a natural outlet to grieving.

Why am I so mad at my sister for dying? She left me alone, I know it wasn't her fault, but I feel so guilty for being angry.

At some time everyone is angry at the person who died. Anger does not mean you loved them less; it means the loss is so great that you want the terrible pain to end.

I can't concentrate, I can't think and I can't remember anything, I think I am losing my mind.

You are not losing your mind, although it may feel that way. Your mind is probably overloaded. Not only do you have to continue to go through your daily routine, but your mind is flooded with thoughts and feelings for your brother or sister. This is temporary; your memory and concentration will return over time.

I have terrible nightmares. Sometimes I dream I am dying.

I can't tell anyone because they will think I am crazy. Am I?

Some grieving people experience intense dreams. Dreams serve as a healthy outlet for the intense feelings you have during the day. As time goes on and you deal with your feelings, your dreams will become less frightening.

I no longer want to be with people. Their conversations are so trivial and shallow. Can you believe my friend thought the end of the world had come when her boyfriend

dumped her? The real disaster is that my brother is dead! Why am I so intolerant?

Many people believe the second year of grief is more difficult than the first year. You feel less numb and more vulnerable to feelings of sadness and helplessness. You have begun to confront painful feelings and memories you worked to avoid during the first year when you were coping with the reality of the loss.

I feel so guilty for the way I yelled at my brother. We would fight about the silliest things. I'll never be able to tell him how sorry I am.

Brothers and sisters in every family quarrel and don't apologize after every argument. Even though you fought, you still loved your brother and he loved you.

Suddenly my parents expect me to parent them. I just can't handle it.

This is truly one of the most unfair positions your grief puts you in. Try to share these feelings with your parents. Hopefully you will be better able to understand one another,

TCF, Baltimore, MD

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 Quakertown - 215-703-8431

TCF Pocono - 570 - 350 - 6695

TCF Easton - 610-515-3526

GRASP (grief recovery after substance passing)
(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