



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

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Victims' Families Need Support After Virginia Tech Tragedy

Oak Brook, IL (April 20, 2007)—The tragic deaths of 32 innocent persons, most of them young people, at the hands of a gunman at Virginia Tech University, is a reminder of the evergrowing need for support that newly bereaved families face.

“We grieve not only for all those who died at Virginia Tech, but also for the nearly 400 children from infant to young adult who die every day in this country,” says Patricia Loder, Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends (TCF), the nation’s largest self-help bereavement organization for families that have experienced the death of a child. “For the family, the deaths of these children is a shattering experience that only those who have been through it can truly comprehend.”

Mrs. Loder, who herself lost two children in a 1991 automobile accident, emphasizes that support for the victim’s families who died at Virginia Tech—from relatives, friends, coworkers, and even people who have never had contact with the family is critical. “It’s important to show that you care and that you will be there for the long haul, not just for the funeral.”

According to Mrs. Loder, there are some universal pointers bereaved parents and siblings agree that those who wish to help may want to keep in mind.

- Don’t try to find magic words that will take away the pain. There aren’t any. A hug and a touch are all that are needed. The simple words “I’m sorry” can offer the most comfort.
- Don’t be afraid to cry. Those tears are a healthy release both for you and the family, and a tribute to the child who died.
- Listen to what the parents, siblings, and other family members have to say. Let them express their anger, their questions, the pain, and the disbelief they may be experiencing. Don’t discourage them from talking about their feelings. Remember that siblings are often considered the “forgotten mourners” and need to have their grief validated, too.
- Be there. Don’t say “call me if there is anything I can do.” That call will probably never come. Think of what the family needs to have done and offer to do specific tasks.
- As time passes, remember the child by sending a card to the family or calling on special days. The worst fear for many parents is that their child will be forgotten.

One of the most important points those seeking to support the families of those who died at Virginia Tech, should remember, adds Mrs. Loder, is that there is no set timetable for grieving. “Some people believe healing starts the moment the family arrives home from the funeral. Bereaved parents and siblings are transformed into different people who will never be the same as they were. Grief doesn’t end in a week or a year, and it may never end. But the pain does get softer in time with the help of friends who care.”

The Compassionate Friends, which has nearly 600 chapters serving all 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, will be holding its 30th National Conference in Oklahoma City July 20-22. Based on past conferences, approximately 25% of the 1200-1500 attending will have been bereaved less than one year. For more information on The Compassionate Friends, support materials available, the national conference, and locations of chapters, visit www.compassionatefriends.org or call toll-free 877-969-0010.

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