



National Office  
P.O. Box 3696  
Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696

## For Immediate Release

April 30, 2001

FROM: Wayne Loder  
Public Awareness Coordinator  
The Compassionate Friends  
(Toll free) 877-969-0010

## **Middle School Bus Tragedy** ***When Children Die, Community Support Important***

When any child dies, it is a tragedy. But when a school is rocked by the death of four students, as Oak Hill Middle School in Newton, Massachusetts was Friday, this becomes a time for the community to pull together to help the grieving families.

“Only a parent who has lost a child can truly understand the devastating and life-changing effect this has on the families involved,” says Patricia Loder, Executive Director of The Compassionate Friends (TCF), an international non-profit self help support group for bereaved families following the death of a child. There are nearly 600 TCF chapters in the United States alone with national organizations in 25 countries around the world.

“It is said that for a parent, when a child dies, the future dies too,” adds Mrs. Loder. “When this is multiplied by the grief of four families, as it was in Newton, it is especially important that the community join together in any way possible to help the families that have been shattered.”

According to Mrs. Loder, there are some universal pointers bereaved parents and siblings agree friends may want to keep in mind when trying to help the grieving family.

- Don't try to find magic words that will take away the pain. There aren't any. A hug, a touch and 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 and siblings 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. Many parents' worst fear is that their child will be forgotten.

One of the most important points friends 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.”

There are 12 Massachusetts TCF chapters including Attleboro, Concord, Gardner, Milford, North Reading, and Worcester, all surrounding the Newton area. Information about the national organization and locations of its nationwide chapters is available by calling toll free 877-969-0010 or by visiting the TCF Web site at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org).