



# To the Newly Bereaved

## *When Your Child Dies*

When your child has died, suddenly it seems like all meaning has been drained from your existence. When you wake in the morning, it's difficult to get out of bed, much less live a "normal" life. All that was right with the world now seems wrong and you're wondering when, or if, you'll ever feel better. We've been there ourselves and understand some of the pain you are feeling right now.

We are truly glad that you have found us but profoundly saddened by the reason. We know that you are trying to find your way in a bewildering experience for which no one can truly be prepared.

When you're newly bereaved, suddenly you find yourself on an emotional roller-coaster where you have no idea what to expect next. Here are thoughts on some of what you may be experiencing or feeling (many will also apply to bereaved siblings and grandparents):

### Psychological

- Your memory has suddenly become clouded. You're shrouded in forgetfulness. You'll be driving down the road and not know where you are or remember where you're going.
- You feel like you are going crazy.

- You find there's a videotape that constantly plays in an endless loop in your mind, running through what happened.
- You find your belief system is shaken and you try to sort out what this means to your faith.
- Placing impossible deadlines on yourself, you go back to work but find that your mind wanders and it's difficult to function efficiently or, some days, at all. Others wonder when you'll be "over it," not understanding that you'll never be the same person you were before your child died—and the passage of time will not make you so.
- You find yourself reading the same paragraph over and over again trying to understand what someone else has written

### Emotional

- You find yourself filled with anger, whether it be at your partner, a person you believe is responsible for your child's death, God, yourself, and even your child for dying.
- You yearn to have five minutes, an hour, a day back with your child so you can tell your child of your love or thoughts left unsaid.
- Guilt becomes a powerful companion as you may blame yourself for the death of your child. Rationally, you know that you were not to blame—you most certainly would have saved your child if you'd been given the chance.
- You feel great sadness as you wrestle with the idea that everything important to you has been taken from you.

### Physical

- Grief can be very physical. You may have numerous aches and pains, stomach difficulties, and other physical symptoms when grieving.
- Either you can't sleep at all or you sleep all the time. You feel physical exhaustion even when you have slept.
- You may no longer care about your health and taking care of yourself—it just doesn't seem that important anymore.
- The tears come when you least expect them.
- Your appetite is either gone or you find yourself overeating.

## Family & Social

- If you have surviving children, you find yourself suddenly overprotective, not wanting to allow them out of your sight. Yet you feel like a neglectful parent because it's so difficult to focus on their needs when you're hurting so bad yourself.
- You find that your remaining family at home grieves the loss differently and you search for a common ground which seems difficult to find.
- You've been told by well-meaning people, even professionals, that 70-80-90% of all couples divorce after their child dies. You are relieved to find that new studies show a much lower divorce rate, from 12-16%, believed to be caused by the "shared experience" aspect of the situation.
- Old friends seem to fade away as you learn they cannot comprehend the extent or length of your grief.
- Things you liked to do, which seemed so important before now, seem meaningless.
- Others say you'll someday find "closure," not understanding that closure never applies when it is the death of your child.
- Fleeting thoughts of pleasurable activities bring about feelings of guilt. If your child can't have that experience, how can you do anything that brings you enjoyment?
- New friends come into your life who understand some of your grief because they've been there themselves.

## Finding the "New Me"

When you're newly bereaved, you don't see how you can put one foot in front of the other, much less survive this loss. You'll never "recover" from your loss nor will you ever find that elusive "closure" they talk of on TV—but eventually you will find the "new me." You will never be the same person you were before your child died. It may be hard to believe now, but in time and with the hard work of grieving, you will one day think about the good memories of when your child lived more so than the unspeakable memories of how your child died. You will even smile and, yes, laugh again someday—as hard to believe as that may seem.

When attending a meeting of The Compassionate Friends, you will be able to listen and learn from others who are further down the grief road than you. They will have made it through that first birthday, first death anniversary, first holiday, and so many other firsts that you have not yet reached. You will learn coping skills from other bereaved parents who, like you, never thought they'd survive. There are no strangers at TCF meetings—only friends you have yet to meet.

More than 50,000 people a month find the support they are seeking through meetings of The Compassionate Friends. Please check our Chapter Locator on our national website for the nearest TCF Chapter. Or call the National Office toll free at 877-969-0010 and we'll be happy to give you a referral to the closest chapter. We have many other ways of providing support including our national website, Online Support Community including the addition of many closed Facebook groups; our national magazine *We Need Not Walk Alone*, available online; our monthly online e-newsletter which talks about the organization and its events; our TCF/USA open Facebook page with over 250,000 members; our Worldwide Candle Lighting the second Sunday of each December; and our annual national conference which includes our Walk to Remember. We will be here as long as you need us. Even though you are newly bereaved and the road is long, we invite you to walk with us for as long as the journey takes.

*This brochure sponsored by Richard and Bonnie Szczepaniak  
in loving memory of  
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