

WE NEED NOT WALK ALONE

*For bereaved families and the people who care about them,
following the death of a child, sibling, or grandchild.*

Autumn 2024



*The
Compassionate
Friends*
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

We are the Bereaved

We are the bereaved
Some of us may retreat
Some of us may gather
Some of us may remain stoic
Some of us may weep for days
Some of us a life time
Some of us will speak of them often
Some of us may not
Some of us may speak of
wanting to join our child
while struggling to live for others
Some days manic
Some days we just can't
And some days we can
This Is us...
We are the bereaved
Imprisoned by It
Slave to love
And a life lost
Bound by grief
We did not choose this
It choose us
This is normal. This is normalizing grief.
My morning coffee with you, Chase Fitzgerald Nelson

- Antoinette Nelson, Chase's Mom

Antoinette writes a morning coffee post every day since her son Chase was killed on March 15, 2021 by a drunk driver. Her beautiful blue eyed boy will forever be 23.

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The Bonds of Shared Grief

Divisiveness and intolerance for others' views seem prevalent all around us today. We see it in our political beliefs, social justice concerns, and health environment. It is apparent within families, workplaces, and organizations. When we are grieving the painful death of a child, grandchild, or sibling, this divisiveness creates walls that can make our sorrow even deeper. It's difficult enough when we're grieving to feel connected to the people around us, and these dividing walls can further isolate us.

The Compassionate Friends credo begins with these words:

*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.*

Uniting people who share this deep grief was the premise that started The Compassionate Friends. The death of our brother, sister, child, or grandchild permeates all aspects of our being. It's something that can't easily be explained to those who have not experienced it, while those who have, possess a deep and compassionate understanding that requires little explanation. The bonds within our TCF community can bridge these chasms we see around us. Rather than being further isolated in our grief, we can feel surrounded by understanding, community, and shared hope that can be lifesaving during this time.

While none of us would choose to be a part of this community given the reason that brought us, we are connected at a deeply meaningful level. It's hard to see someone across the table with a similar loss and stay in a place of intolerance and anger. When we remember what binds us as a group and honor our shared losses, we focus on supportive and comforting connectedness. When we reach for the love in our hearts that's bolstered by our shared sorrow, we can model a greater energy that's needed in our world. Our child, grandchild, or sibling who died and brought us to TCF is honored each time we choose this path of connection through our differences rather than more division because of them.

Warmly,
Shari O'Loughlin, MBA, CPC
CEO
The Compassionate Friends

To Be My Friend, You Can't Fear Grief

To be my friend, you can't fear grief
Grief is a companion that walks beside me every day
Sometimes quietly, observing me from the shadows
At times tugging on my sleeve, demanding attention
And some days, inviting me to lie quietly, while it covers me like a blanket.

But grief is not a jealous companion
No, it welcomes others to join us
In the morning, joy comes to visit at the first light on the hill
Wonder comes with us when we walk in the desert
In the evening, under the stars, we gladly welcome mystery
And we invite laughter to sit at the table with our friends
But grief is a constant, abiding companion, a steady presence.

To be my friend, you must embrace all of me
And accept that grief is part of me, like the air I breathe
If you turn away, and shun my grief, you shame me
But if you have courage - courage to sit with me and my grief
My heart will soften with the gentle breeze of love
And grief will flow through me like a river
Leaving me calm and peaceful, grateful that you are my friend.

- Karen Howe, Claire's Mom

How have the friendships you've made through The Compassionate Friends helped you cope with your loss?

TCF meetings: an oasis where everyone "gets it." So different from everyday life. Sharing and witnessing one another's grief transcends barriers of gender, age, race, belief, politics. Not only have I become close to people in our group over time, but long-term friendships in my life outside the group have deepened, and family members have become closer than ever before.

Alice Parman, Jane's Grandma



Take a Grief Break

by Ann Marie Miller, Brad's Mom

It was a nice day. Summer sun shining. Birds singing. I was having one of the worst panic attacks I had since our son passed the year before. Brad was 19, when he and friends had that car accident in August 1987, and our lives were changed forever.

It was almost a year that passed, the following June, when I saw a news article and photo of women looking at balloons and in tears. It was about The Compassionate Friends, Bergen/Passaic chapter, having Children's Memorial Day. There was a name and phone number. I called. I spoke to the first bereaved parent that understood. This was the beginning of over sixteen years of helping Chapter Leader Rosemary Ravella run the Bergen/Passaic (NJ) chapter, editing the newsletter, facilitating, and fundraising to help so many through TCF.

Margie was a chapter member who had suffered the loss of two children. She was older than me, wiser than me, and always knew the right thing to say. She started calling me mornings and a brief chat helped both of us get through the day. When she called this day I was in tears, telling Margie I could not get dressed, I could not decide what to wear, and I was afraid to be alone.

"I want you to go outside," she said. "I want you to feel the sun for only five minutes, and then come back inside. Then tomorrow I want you to go outside for ten minutes, feel the breeze, listen to the birds, and then go back into the house. Go outside," she said.

"Margie, I get it," I said. I did.

"You have to have a break from grief, even if it is five minutes. Promise me you will do this," Margie told me. Anything for Margie, so I did. I went outside in my bathrobe, and the summer sun that morning was not too hot yet. I felt the thumping in my chest slow down, and heard sounds that were not my heartbeat. Five minutes passed and I went back into the house and found yesterday's clothes to put on. I felt Margie was watching, so the next morning I went outside for ten minutes, maybe more. When I went back into the house the phone was ringing. It was Margie.

"Are you dressed?" She asked. "Did you go outside?"

"Margie, I am dressed. I did what you said. How did you know it would work?"

"Well, my therapist said you have to have a grief break because then you can come back to your grief with some strength. I like to go outside."

Margie helped many people with her wisdom and advice. I passed it on to other bereaved parents at the next meeting. Sally said, "I like to watch cartoons. I come home to an empty house and cry. I don't even feel like eating."

Another said, "I like to go to the movies. Maybe I will go to the movies." Later she told us she went to three movies in one day.

The next month Sally said, "I come home from work and watch cartoons before I do anything. Now I can watch them for 30 minutes, and then I can cook and get ready for work the next day and it is so much easier." Our group shared about grief breaks often, and I would hear older members share with new members about how they make it part of every day.

It was interesting to hear how others felt about their grief breaks, all different, but the results were the same. The time for them increased. There was a sense of bringing something back to our grief and we could feel a change. It was a good change for me. I bought new clothes in colors that coordinated with what I had and did not have to make decisions, thanks to Margie.

The promise of friendship and understanding with The Compassionate Friends means so much to me, and I have lifelong friends that still share. Margie and Sally have long ago become angels but they are part of my memories, the life I live now.

Ann Marie, now 82 years old lost her son Bradley in car accident in 1987. She joined TCF in 1988 and helped run the Bergen/Passaic (NJ) Chapter over sixteen years with Rosemary Ravella (Albanese). She served as facilitator, editor, fundraiser, community outreach, and publicity.

How have the friendships you've made through The Compassionate Friends helped you cope with your loss?

The friendships I've formed through The Compassionate Friends Facebook groups have been a lifeline in my grief. Connecting with others who truly understand my pain, even from a distance, brings comfort and a sense of belonging. Their compassion and shared experiences offer strength and hope, helping me navigate the darkest moments. These online bonds remind me that I'm not alone and can honor my son Daniel while finding support in a caring community.

Carol Martin, Daniel's Mom



Grief as a Friend

by Jennifer Clay, Aubrey's Mom

At this point, Grief is my companion.

Do not get the word companion and friend confused. Grief is no friend. I did not invite her in, nor want her to stay. Yet, there she is...prompting tears unprovoked, adding a heaviness to special occasions. She has her eyes on me constantly, never straying too far from my side. She likes to remind me of "Before"; before my life drastically changed; before I knew her.

Now, just because I do not call Grief my friend does not mean I have ill feelings towards her. To be honest, she is comforting. Grief is the last golden thread that I have to my baby. She is the last thing I must hold onto - to ensure he is not completely lost to this world. Grief is my connection;

not only to him, but to other heartbroken mamas and daddies; an instant bond with the dull look in their eyes. The look that says, "I have known deep heartache." We identify with each other by that look and our familiarity with a mutual acquaintance - Grief.

I have made peace with Grief. Now when I am blue, I welcome her for a short time. She is not as all-consuming as she used to be. She has learned her place and I have learned to give her space. I guess now I can call her my friend.

Jennifer Clay shares that her son is in heaven and that this road is not for the faint of heart. She hopes to hold your hand as you navigate the path together.

Gifts From My Son

by Shari O'Loughlin, Connor's Mom and Patti's Sister



My beloved son, Connor was 14 when we received the devastating news that he had been killed in an accident. I could not comprehend this loss nor imagine a lifetime without him. There was so much unfinished that we had left to do, and it was dark for a long time before I could see any light.

Connor taught us so much in the relatively short time he was here. While I knew the many gifts that we were given from Connor's life, it took time to see some of the gifts that we have received since he left us. These are some of the things that I better understand and experience more deeply now.

I see the setting sun, the configuration of the stars, and the majesty of the mountains and seas, in ways I was not able to before.

I hear sounds more prominently and with finer differentiation, clarity, and beauty.

I experience music in a new way, as it moves deeply within my body and soul, lifting my spirit and heart.

I have a greater capacity for gratitude, and every day that I remember to begin from there is a better day.

Scents have much deeper resonance now, and they speak to me clearly without words.

My heart having been shattered, is now more open with a richer capacity for empathy and the ability to feel all of life's emotions.

The children we've been given to grow and guide are precious gifts for the time we are given with them here.

A gift is still a gift even if it isn't in our possession forever or nearly as long as we had planned.

We share a far greater human connectedness than our apparent differences suggest. This connectedness is often stronger when created from deep loss that requires rebuilding.

Nothing is static, and no feeling or understanding is final. It is always a moving river and will change with time and as we grow with new beginnings.

Laughter and smiles create a vital life force energy that is a natural high. It feels like a miracle when it returns after having been deeply deprived of it through tragedy.

There is much more beyond what we can physically see and understand around us.

Miracles do exist, even when they did not always come when I needed them most.

We truly only have this moment to manifest, to love, to experience joy, and we need to live all our moments to the fullest.

Shari O'Loughlin is chief executive officer for The Compassionate Friends. In 2012, Shari found her local TCF chapter in Albuquerque, NM, after the sudden death of her beloved 14-year-old son, Connor. She became involved with TCF and presented workshops at national conferences. Shari published the book, Life from the Ashes; Finding Signs of Hope After Loss and is a bereaved parent and a bereaved sibling from her youth. Shari is a proud mom to her two loving young adult daughters.

Understanding and Respecting Cultural Differences in Mourning

by Nivia Vázquez, Yoito's Mom and Mercedes Marqués, José's Mom



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When I laugh, I laugh in my mother tongue; When I cry, I cry in my mother tongue;

When I scream my pain, I do so in my mother tongue; When I speak with the spirits,

I do so in my mother tongue.

~Author Unknown

When we leave our native country, we also leave our way of life, our customs, our history until that moment in time, our friends, and perhaps even part of our family. All of these things have been our source of wisdom, survival, and support. We know that saying goodbye means absence and distance. Later we begin a new life with the personal tools that we brought with us; we gradually begin to adapt

by adding to our tools from the community around us. However, when we face the pain of losing a child, we remember and miss what we left behind.

Cultural heritage, especially beliefs and rituals, becomes deeply important and necessary during those painful moments and celebrations of bereavement. Our heritage accompanies us in our life journey through grief, healing, and reconciliation. In our language, our so-called “mother” or “native” tongue, we learned about our culture, how we relate to others and air our emotions and feelings. We speak the same language; we share and are united by the same culture; and we recognize the importance of our feelings, our pain, and our grief being understood by others.

We cry in our native tongue, even if we speak more than one language because we need to speak in our mother tongue when we are overcome by a great emotion. We laugh and cry, we feel our pain, and our soul aches in our language.

The workshop “Nuestros Hijos e Hijas en Nuestros Corazones para Siempre” (Our Children Forever in Our Hearts) and the sharing session “Sesión para Compartir” are held in Spanish. It has been successfully presented at every TCF National Conference since 2012 in Costa Mesa, California. At the workshop and sharing session issues are addressed on mothers’ and fathers’ grief as individuals and as couples, surviving children, sibling grief, grandparents’ grief and cultural diversity regarding mourning of the Latino and Spanish speaking community. It also provides a personal and emotional atmosphere with the language and culture, and the sharing session that immediately follows the workshop that never seems to end! Additionally, at this year’s conference in New Orleans familiar uplifting songs addressing grief in Spanish were played and attendees became involved by humming these songs. Even copies of the songs were requested and distributed! A very emotional, uplifting and healing encounter indeed. “Enhorabuena”, Congratulations TCF for providing diversity and inclusiveness in this important healing process to the bereaved Hispanic community.

Diversity is a broad concept that includes race, ethnicity, religion, gender, spirituality, the different ways of seeing, understanding, and facing life and death, grief, and the beliefs of the spiritual life after death. These are the reasons we need to be conscious and aware of the diversity that is found in our support groups: That the word compassion, which identifies us as an organization, signifies an obligation to learn and know about this diversity will ultimately sensitize us to accept and respect. In this way, we all will feel accompanied and will not have to walk alone because we are different.

Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there and be guided by the truth as one sees it. But no one has the right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth. ~M. Gandhi

Nivia Vázquez, BSS, PPSC, professional translator, former member of the Board of Directors, Chapter Leader of Los Amigos Compasivos San Juan, Puerto Rico Chapter, bereaved mother of José Francisco “Yoito” Barreto Vázquez, bereaved sister of Teresita and Miguel Vázquez and cousin Myrna Vázquez. She is also the mother of Roberto José Barreto Vázquez.

Mercedes Marqués, EdD, MPH, MSW, MPA, SLSW retired social work professor at the University of Puerto Rico, co-chapter leader of Los Amigos Compasivos San Juan, Puerto Rico Chapter, bereaved mother of José Alberto Gallart Marqués, and mother of José Angel and Frances.

How have the friendships you've made through The Compassionate Friends helped you cope with your loss?

The fellows I have met while involved with TCF have been so very instrumental in my healing process. Living in the world, experiencing the most isolating grief, it is critical to have a support group of people that get it. That pulls you out when you get stuck. I am so grateful to have this network of support.

Kelly Sibley, Breanna's Mom

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You Need Not Attend a Grief Conference Alone: *An Adult Sibling's Perspective*

by Earla Legault



I took the opportunity to attend the 2024 TCF National Conference in New Orleans. With the fresh eyes of a newcomer, it would be my first TCF in-person meeting and conference, having only ever met TCF people online.

With few expectations, I knew from the past what going to a big conference was like. After working in libraries for 25+ years and attending national and regional conferences, I knew there would be a lot of people and loads of learning. I'd also be in my element of gathering resources and creating connections for life after the conference. However, a grief conference...?! What was I getting myself into?!!

I decided to be brave one morning in early April not to 'phone it in' to the conference but to participate in person. Despite my slightly trepidatious heart, 'It's going to be grief-y there,' I decided it would be an adventure to attend. I made arrangements to meet up with my Sibling Grief Book Club host and flew to Houston from the west coast of Canada. My slight trepidation of never meeting in person didn't stop me. Having attended TCF peer support groups,

I'd be amongst my peers who by now knew my sister and I. And a gals road trip to New Orleans with Marie and gals in her family, bonus!

Reflecting back today, my reasons for attending the TCF USA's National Conference in person led me to know it felt right for me:

- I want to continue to learn how to better support myself and others through educational workshops
- I'd connect with TCF USA siblings met facilitating and attending online peer grief support groups
- An opportunity was there to 'give back' to TCF to present a Sharing Session for siblings re: creatively
- Acceptance in person of the 2024 Karen Snapp Outstanding Sibling Award for advocating.
- I share the book I co-wrote with the people we interviewed and also connect with other authors.

I am a lifelong learner, and that has been prevalent in my seeking ways how to better support myself while grieving.

Various workshops, regardless of the relationships delved into, allowed me to learn from others' perspectives. One of the most important ones to me was hearing from other siblings and dealing with multiple losses.

Connecting with TCF USA siblings I met people I've known online in their peer grief support groups where we've heard and witnessed each other's stories for several years. I have never taken the opportunity to attend a TCF in-person meeting as the nearest one is in the evening, one hour away. Though I attended local grief groups through our nearest city hospice and went on to create sibling support programming, there are no current sibling groups that meet up in person that I know of in Canada.

Leading a Sharing Session for siblings at the conference turned out to be fun. As a TCF volunteer during the pandemic, I shared my creative process through grief work using art supplies and helpful resources weekly. In NOLO, I sat in a circle with lovely human beings, witnessed each others' stories while trying our hand at what I've found useful when process grief; in finding my voice by creating zines, small handmade books together.

Accepting TCF USA's 2024 Karen Snapp Outstanding Sibling Award was a bonus. TCF is an organization that aligns with my goal; recognizing the importance of advocating for adult sibling programming. I can see the award every time I sit at my art table now, either to create or to Zoom with other siblings.

Living With Sibling Grief; Imagining a Way Forward, a book I co-wrote came out a week before the conference. Choosing to travel light, I brought just a few copies for Jordon, Keith and Maggie. Being able to hand them a resource for sibling was another bonus, I brought along bookmarks to share hand-to-hand with other siblings. My co-writer Monica could not attend, so I fulfilled my promise to her by taking selfies with siblings. My Thank you speak contained quotes from conference presenters, a collective shout out with joy to my niece Sarah and an opportunity for others to say hi to Monica.

Meeting up in person with the TCF siblings I have come to know over the last five years was a true joy for me! Having travelled to the conference via a plane ride from Vancouver, BC, Canada and a girls' road trip from Houston, I didn't say to myself 'What am I doing this for?' Like I did the first time I took volunteer training.

I took the advice of others who attended grief support conferences: take time for yourself. One night, I sat by the

pool alone to eat my take-out supper while listening to children splash and giggle. Instead of sweating over 'which presentation do I attend?' Saturday morning, I chose to sit in lobby with a smiling woman I happened to meet who was TCF's first female president. Dropping into Sibling Island to toast to Russell and Leigh-Ann and to hug facilitators solidified what I know; our mutual interest in giving back through offering our peer support through TCF will continue. We aren't doing our 'grief work' alone.

A reason to attend the conference I had not dreamed of was I'd also be able to connect with other Canadians to create a more compassionate and inclusive TCF Canada. I thought 'Out of 1,000 people, there must be one other Canadian.' Indeed, there were twenty of us from the west to the east coast. Because of my nationalist pride and recognition of the need to support adult siblings in Canada, TCF USA helped me learn about this supportive worldwide organization's original mandate of supporting families. Today, TCF Canada's mandate does not include peer grief support for all members of a family; adult siblings and grandparents are excluded.

It is my hope that, with steps taken because of my connections made at the conference, supportive programming and resources will soon be offered to all Canadian regardless of their relationship to the person who died, regardless of a person's age. I believe your country has the population to support and serve adult siblings. 'If you build it, they will come'; create an opportunity, and adult sibling volunteers will step up. 80% of the population has a sibling.

To take the time and energy to connect at a conference, was a celebration for myself. Attending a grief conference showed me just how far I had come on my path when processing the death of my sister Leigh-Ann. My 'grief work' continues today while advocating for sibling who grieve, through resource like a book, a podcast, a peer support meet up or a grief support conference. I went from being a sister who felt broken, to become someone who feels healthy, happy, and can laugh again. Attending a TCF National Conference is a testament to my tenacity to both 'feel the feels' and share with my peers. I will see them next year in Bellevue!

Earla Dawn Legault is an artist advocating creativity to process loss. In the fall of 2013, her sister, Leigh-Ann, diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, died ten weeks later at fifty-one-and-a-half years old. Earla co-hosts an online Canada Sibling Sharing Circle. Earla co-wrote and illustrated the book, Living With Sibling Grief: Imagining a Way Forward with sibling grief buddy Monica Murphy.



Hat

by Gabriela Vannier, Jayde's Mom

When she was born, so tiny, so fragile.. her little head about the size of a navel orange, nothing fit her... the beautiful articles and items gifted at the shower thrown in her honor, in anticipation of the first born... We made do with what we had. Afterall, blankets and such could be bunched, wrapped, folded and tucked in all sorts of ways to keep a baby warm.

After she came home from the hospital there were visitors, and more gifts. Now, knowing this little person, knowing fully what her needs were, and what gifts would be useful.. and understanding that those things that were received and opened before her birth may never be used.. the post-birth gifts included tiny items, preemie outfits and accessories. Among them was a tiny gray and white knit hat with an under-the-chin tie, to keep it from falling off. It was the perfect size, and since she was born in November, we got a lot of use out of it that first Winter.

While many of those first gifts - the items of clothing, the blankets, etc got passed along, or handed down over the

years, the gray and white hat seemed to migrate around for some reason, showing up in random places, at random times. For a while, it was living in my dresser drawer. Another time it was discovered inside the pocket of a coat that had been hanging in the closet by the front door. While it was often a bittersweet discovery, when it turned up here or there, no one ever questioned its seeming ability to be found. Later, it was spotted in the junk drawer, too small to really get in the way of the other things in there: pens, a stapler, scotch tape, scissors, keys, owner's manuals and such. For another bit of time, it was in my other daughter's room, on the head of a doll that sat on her bed with a number of stuffed animals. But, as children grow and change, interests follow and the hat was returned to me.

Some time had passed without a hat sighting until one morning when I was driving my son to school. He suddenly realized that he had forgotten a mask. I told him to look in the glove compartment. As he was fishing around for a new, clean mask for class, he said, "Hey, what's this?" He pulled

out the crumpled knit clump. My son was just two when she passed and so he didn't remember her, though I told him and showed him photographs. When I saw what he had taken out, there was that familiar pang, the heart pucker. When I told him what it was, he was in disbelief. "But it's SO SMALL!" "Yes, she was a tiny little thing." I outstretched my hand and asked to have it. The moment that I wrapped my fingers around it, I instantly remembered my daughter's scent, the way her head felt, resting in my palm, how chubby her cheeks looked when she wore it.

After I dropped my son off at school, I sat parked for a bit, eyes closed, clutching the small garment. I wanted the experience to last, the feeling of my daughter's presence, for a little longer.

Gabriela writes for catharsis and to hopefully comfort and reassure others who have experienced loss, that they are not alone; that there are others of us who DO understand, and who share the burden. "Pain shared is pain divided."

How have the friendships you've made through The Compassionate Friends helped you cope with your loss?

TCF has become the support I needed and didn't have. When I got married earlier this month, my local TCF family and my SIBS were there to support me. I was fortunate enough to have two people walk me down the aisle - one of my TCF parents and one of my SIBs. The relationships I've made through TCF have literally saved my life and provided me with support when I had none.

Katy Leach, Kristin's Sister



Coping with the Loss of a Toddler

by Milan Lopes, Elena's Mom

Ground zero of my grief was a room set aside for families in the emergency section of St. Joseph's Hospital. Beige walls lined with unimposing chairs closed in on me. Doctors came and left. Family members surrounded me. Police officers and a priest came to speak with me. Each one repeated the same mantra, "It's not your fault". Unbeknownst to them, this seed of guilt was planted in my heart and spread its dark tentacles into every corner of my soul.

My daughter Elena was twenty-two months old when she passed away. I hadn't seen it coming. The day before she passed she'd chased bubbles. I tickled her until she squealed with delight. I read her a book on my knee, tucked her in, and gave her a goodnight kiss. The next day, she was gone. She slipped through my fingertips like sand. I thought her life was permanent, a fact. She would outlive me. She would have children someday. My world came crashing down,

fragmenting at the seams. How could her little courageous heart stop beating?

From the moment of conception, a parent's life changes form; new duties, dreams, and responsibilities. An evolution into a completely new identity with an innate instinct to protect their child. After suffering their devastating loss, there's a sense of failure.

Losing a toddler is a unique grieving experience. Elena was growing healthy and strong. She was learning her alphabet and numbers. She would say "I wuv you" and sing with me. Losing her also meant the loss of her future. A thousand tiny moments I wouldn't have traded for the world.

In this day and age, with such advances in technology, losing a toddler is so rare that people can't help but wonder how it happened. Every time someone asked me "how", it

was as if they were asking me to relive my deepest trauma for the benefit of their curiosity. My depressed mind told me they wanted to know if I was the one to blame, but the truth is, my judgment was clouded by grief. When someone asks, it's more than okay to say "I'm not ready to talk about it yet" if that's the case.

During the first few months of my grief journey, I joined grief counseling, and grieving parent Facebook groups. I felt as though no one could relate to my grief. Most people I came across had lost adult children, miscarried, or experienced prolonged illness with their child.

I felt isolated and stigmatized at having lost a toddler. I kept asking myself, "How could I let this happen?". I met other parents who'd lost children decades prior who'd say they felt as though it were yesterday. Everyone's grief journey is unique to them. Every bereaved parent is bonded by the shared experiences of grief, guilt, and love.

No matter the age of a child who passes, each parent has some kind of guilt that torments them. More destructive than grief, guilt tears one apart until shreds of the heart and soul remain intact. It's important to understand that our children come from us but do not belong to us. A parent shapes their child's destiny, but can't control it.

To begin healing and fully embrace life one must let go of guilt. It seems impossible, or even disrespectful at first, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. After losing Elena, I asked myself, "How can I go on without you?". It felt like my life stopped, and if I moved forward it would be away from my life with her, a betrayal. I resented others for celebrating holidays, for laughing, for living, but I know now that my grief was in control, not me.

There's a formula I follow to make it through each day. Hope, faith, love. The trauma of her loss is the same, the grief is always there, and there is a way to cope.

A. J. Cronin once wrote, "Hell is the place where one has ceased to hope". Hope is the tether that keeps me going. I am learning to tell myself "It's not my fault" and live alongside my pain. I find hope in the little signs I believe she sends me, like a ladybug on a cold winter day, or a bible reference when my grief has a hold of me.

Faith feeds my hope and hope feeds my faith. Spiritually I have faith that she is with me every day and knows the effort I put into honoring her life. I have faith her soul still exists, that she is at peace and beyond all pain. She knows the immensity of my love for her and the immensity of my pain.

Everyone's grief journey is unique to them. Every bereaved parent is bonded by the shared experiences of grief, guilt, and love.

Leaning on the support from my local church has helped me find purpose and meaning in life, but it isn't a one-size-fits-all cure. Regardless of one's personal beliefs, the message

remains the same; faith is the opposite of anxiety, and hope is the opposite of depression. By finding ways to strengthen the former, you will defeat the latter.

I am learning to love the person I am, and the mother I will always be because of her. Grief doesn't go away in time. Guilt doesn't magically fade away. As I evolve during my grief journey I am learning to forgive myself. I honor her memory daily and share my love of her with those who are still living.

Her life has inspired artwork, poetry, and charity. Her love has bridged broken relationships and brought together communities. I am grateful for the time I had with her and the love I share because of her.

Though my heart is breaking daily, I am not broken. I am not healed, I am healing. I am grieving, I am not my grief. With hope, faith, and love I will embrace another day.

Milan Lopes graduated from CSUEB with a Bachelor's in English and a minor in creative writing. She has self-published a book of poetry, "Violets, Violence, Valiance" along with several distinguished articles and short stories. She currently resides in Elk Grove, California working as a freelance writer.

Gratitude Reframed

by Heather Leisher Coffin, Envy's Mom



I've been thinking a lot over these past few months about how wrong I've been all of these years. I always thought that gratitude and positivity were the keys to everything. I used to write in a gratitude journal every single morning. I would write my largest goal from the point of view that I was grateful for already achieving that goal. Then I would write 10 things that I was most grateful for. I created vision boards over the years that depicted what I wanted to achieve and I would look at them each day with gratitude for what I would be bringing into my life. The vision boards really seemed to work; when I look back at older ones, I can see how I was able to put what I wanted down on paper and it helped to guide me in the directions that I most wanted to go. Daily gratitude journaling made me feel glad and well. It helped me focus on the positive even in seemingly negative situations. The effect was that I had retrained my brain to always look for an opportunity in any situation rather than lamenting or complaining "Why me?"

When my husband, Tom, had a major skiing accident in Montana and shattered his knee so badly that he was bedridden for months, had to have three major surgeries and I had to run our business solo while being his caregiver, my brain went immediately into gratitude. I was grateful that he was alive. I was grateful that Skyler hadn't been injured. I was grateful for surgeons and x-rays and fast acting ski patrol response.

Even directly after my daughter died, just a couple of days later, I wrote her eulogy with a focus on my gratitude for our time that we had been able to spend with her on this earth, brief though it had been. But after the service, after the meals stopped coming and the cards stopped trickling in, after people started wondering when we would be normal again, back to ourselves, I couldn't even think about being grateful. I was embarrassed by my previously simplistic approach to life and angry with myself for writing that way for her eulogy. How dare I feel grateful for 17 years with this person who should have been with us for decades more. Gratitude seemed like an imposter to my grief. It seemed disrespectful and callous to think of my former self advising my current self on the power of gratitude for the loss of my beautiful child. Gratitude was like a clown showing up to a vigil. Gratitude was like sharing thoughts and prayers with victims of gun violence. I had no space for it in my heart and I had no intention of feeling grateful for this irrevocable loss.

On our daughter's birthday weekend, something happened that gave me pause and caused me to reconsider my gratitude strike. We had all gathered for her 18th birthday weekend. Not knowing how I would survive that day, I decided to throw a huge party. I invited my family and friends. We had activities planned, a giant party tent, lights and candles everywhere....it would be a weekend to

remember. I wanted her to be honored and remembered; I didn't want to spend the day sobbing in her room by myself. I did end up spending the day sobbing in her room by myself, but I pulled myself together for the gathering. Family and friends came from far and near. We all held candles and gathered around the fire as we shared ideas that Envy had shared with us about the things that she wanted to do with her life. We decided to compile a bucket list of her wishes, no matter how large or small, so that we could collectively decide on accomplishing her goals in her memory. Her grandmother organized a book drive and we gathered 18 books on inclusivity and diversity to donate to our local school and public libraries. We chose a tree to plant, selected the place to plant it and decided to put a portion of her ashes in with it as we ceremoniously planted it for her. It was a yellow Magnolia called 'Butterflies.' Yellow was her favorite color.

After the tree planting ceremony, we had one last activity to do. My 9-year-old niece, Sadie had come up with the idea of writing Envy letters on birch bark. We had gotten an enormous amount of rain the day before; so much rain that we'd had to postpone the tree planting from Saturday to Sunday. The brook was very high and running swiftly, and we decided to place our letters to Envy into the brook and let them float away with the water. Nobody showed their letters to anyone else, but Sadie shared hers with me. It said, "I didn't know what to say before, but now I know what to say. Thank you."

In the days after the gathering, I actually could not remember the thank you part and I was trying to remember, so I asked my sister if she had read Sadie's letter. She had, and she told me that Sadie had written, "Thank you." Sadie was expressing her gratitude for Envy's presence in her life even after I had dismissed my trust in gratitude and tossed it aside as a frivolous and silly gesture. My 9-year-old niece, in her bewilderment and grief was able to find a way to say thank you for the years of love that Envy had shown her. There is a quiet power in that act of noticing, of appreciating, of remembering. It takes our loss from focusing on the gigantic void and hurt and turns it into something beautiful and special. We have our deep loss because of the love we shared. We carry our grief because of the grace of her life. It gave me permission to be grateful for her again.

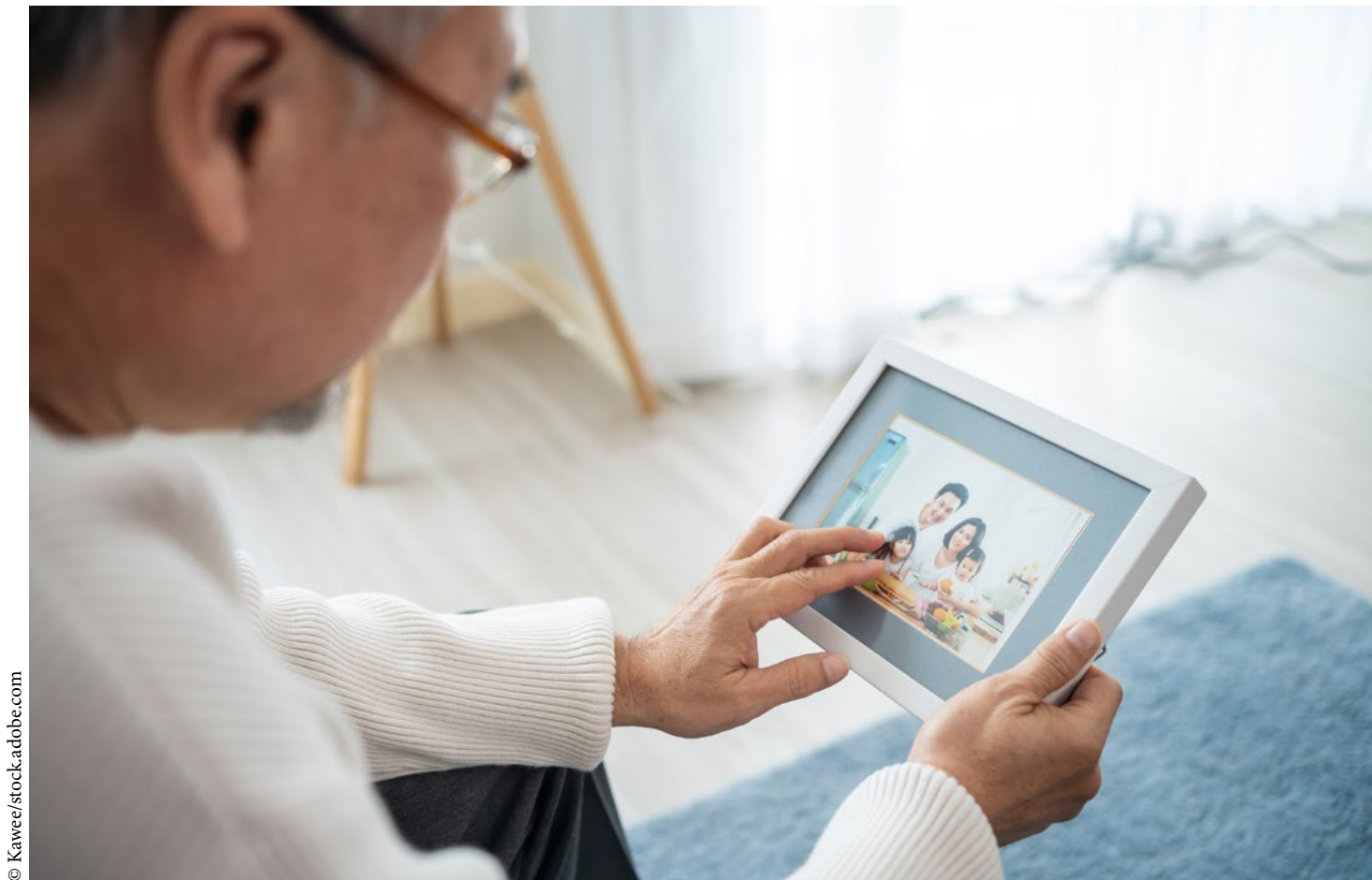
I've written a lot of very sad things since she died. I wrote this in July, when I was feeling particularly ashamed of writing such a lovely and upbeat eulogy.

*I picked up the earring
The earring you wore
The smell sent me reeling*

*Shock and horror
We couldn't find both
So you wore just the one
The bright red bird skull
Contrast so stark
To your pale skin
And dark hair
Purple faded
Natural roots peeking out
I wear the ring you wore that day
But the crystal that was around your neck
I couldn't bring myself to place
On my body.
Although dad kept it in his pocket
On the day that we faced the world with our grief
And soothed them with our brave faces
Perhaps it was a mistake to make
A positive spin on your life
Because you were such a positive spin on ours
And now that you're gone
Life grinds on
Relentless
And no positive spins remain
After all, your remains
Sit glaring at me from the mantle
Each day
A reminder
Of the limitations of love
In its incapacity to keep
Safe
The people we were brave enough
To don our capes of love for.*

You can tell that at the end, I felt jaded and deprived, slammed by the universe for having trust and faith that my love, my positivity, my gratitude could have kept her safe. And it's true. Gratitude cannot fix everything. It can't bring someone back from being dead. It can't safeguard us from the pain of loss. But it can help us shift our perspective. This pain will always be here but so will the memory of her incredible smile. The loss will shape my future forever, but so will the sound of her voice singing "Imagine" in the third grade. Our family will never be the same without her, just as it was never the same once she burst onto the scene with all of her joy, laughter, silliness and kind-hearted self.

Heather's 17-year-old daughter, Envy, died on February 11, 2023, on her brother's birthday. Envy was transgender and wonderful. Heather writes as a way to process her grief and recently started a writing a "book" on her relationship with gardening and grief.



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Yearning, Longing, Pining, Craving, Wishing, Aching, Desiring: I Want Him (or Her) Back

by Dr. Bob Baugher

I don't have to tell you—one of the toughest parts of grief is yearning for your loved one. Grief has all kinds of painful qualities, but day after day, moment after moment wanting our loved one back is excruciating, right? How does this yearning thing take place? Let's look.

Fascinating insight into this reaction came from research by Dr. Mary-Francis O'Connor who wrote the book in 2022, *The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss*. By placing people whose loved one had died into a machine that scans the brain (MRI), O'Connor offered us insight into how and why the brain yearns. Without getting too technical, I'm going to attempt to summarize for you what O'Connor discovered.

When someone we love leaves us, our brain continues to be flooded with memories of the way they look, the way they sound, the way they smell, the way they feel which, over and over, causes us to yearn to find them again. Our brain does everything in its power to keep us united with the ones we love. Brain research has shown that yearning is an attempt to activate the part of the brain called the Nucleus Accumbens which has been deemed the pleasure center (however, it is more than that). From the perspective of our brain, yearning is best described as: "I want the reward of seeing her, hearing her, touching her, smelling her again."

What else happens to our brain when our loved one is removed?

The answer is: our brain secretes an increase of a stress hormone called cortisol. Therefore, absence not only causes stress, but it also removes the very person who can give you comfort. So, grief hits you doubly—pain + lack of comfort. The pain of grief is our brain's way of saying, "Pay attention—this is important. I want him back."

Yearning involves two types of thoughts

Intrusive Thoughts: Has this happened to you? "Out of nowhere I thought about him." The key feature of intrusive thoughts is: You are not in control of them. Researcher Panksepp termed the brain system that controls our response to yearning: Panic/Grief. This panic response activates us to call out to others for comfort. He saw this in animals as they made sounds that alerted others that something was wrong. We worry about what our intrusive thoughts mean. The simple answer is: It's what our brain is doing in its attempt to make sense of the loss.

Controlled Thoughts: These are thoughts, that, of your own free will, for example when you decide to tell a story about your loved one, to remind you of the life this person lived.

During grief, intrusive thoughts bring up pain. Intrusive thoughts say, "Oh, I need to text her." which brings pain. Your brain is trying to catch up with the reality that your loved one is never coming back. So, when we yearn, it is our wanting our loved here now. In its yearning, our brain often goes into the "What if" mode: What if the triggering event of the death didn't happen? What if my loved one recovered and didn't die? What if this was all a dream? And, on and on and on.

Coping with Grief

O'Connor put coping with grief this way: "[To] restore a meaningful life requires flexibly moving our attention from thinking about the past to thinking about the present and the future." In other words, if the present has little to offer

us, we will spend more time yearning. The less we want to live in the present, the more we yearn. Perhaps you feel guilty for living in the present. Moreover, you've perhaps already experienced people attempting to drag you to the present with things like empty cliches "He would want you to be happy." "Life goes on." Or "We want your old self back" none of which helps. They try to expose you to the present by finding ways to keep you busy. They even avoid bringing up the past thinking that talking about your loved one will make you feel worse. Really?

What to Do Now

So, if you haven't done so already, tell everyone that you know your life has forever changed but what you now need is their help by supporting your yearning. Remind them that you are coping as best you can by tolerating and enduring the harsh realization that your loved one is never coming back. Inform them that what you really need right now are people who understand that you are still yearning and will do so for as long as you need to. Assure them that supporting your yearning will not "prolong" your grief. Tell them that they can provide the most support by saying your loved one's name, telling stories of this person's life, and remembering to contact you on important days by saying, "I'm thinking of your loved one and just wanted you to know that I remember." As you have come to know, this is the type of support we need as we daily cope with the aching physical absence of a person we continue to love.

Regards,
Dr. Bob

Dr. Bob Baugher is a psychologist and certified death educator who teaches at Highline College in Des Moines, WA. He is the professional adviser for the South King County Chapter of TCF. Bob is the author of grief-related books and several articles on coping with bereavement. For the past 25 years, he has been invited to present workshops at most TCF national conferences.

Assure them that supporting your yearning will not "prolong" your grief.

My Grief is Not a Journey

by Lisa Olney, Ellie's mom



The sun was kind enough to hide behind the clouds today. I've managed to leave the comfort of my bed and settle under a blanket in the living room recliner. It's December 19, 2022. Twenty years ago today, my daughter, Ellie, died. Her white memorial Christmas tree shimmers from the corner of the dining room; reflections of its sparkling angel ornaments dance across the wall.

Like many bereaved parents, I prefer to call this Ellie's "angel day." The alternative—anniversary—implies celebration, and there is nothing to celebrate. This brings to mind another word I've developed an aversion to in the last twenty grieving years—journey.

As an English major, I am no stranger to the teachings of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, or "hero's journey." I taught this narrative cycle to undergraduates and assigned an essay reflecting on their own "hero's journey" to college. I wasn't far into the grading before the word journey started to grate on my nerves. I blamed the annoyance on the trivial,

repetitive use in their stories, until I came across an article that referenced grief as a journey. That's when I realized it wasn't how the word was being used in my students' stories, but in my own.

Grief is so often referenced as a journey, but I cannot align with that metaphor. A journey, by definition, has a beginning and an end. In Campbell's monomyth, "heroes" answer a calling from the universe then face a series of obstacles that lead to a pivotal moment of change and understanding. They return home victorious, a "master of both worlds," as Campbell puts it.

But I am no hero. There was no call to action; the universe didn't offer a choice in my daughter's death. And while the aftermath of her loss led me to trials that sometimes made me stronger, there will never be a triumphant return home. So, when people ask me about the memoir I'm writing, and I catch myself answering, "It's about a journey through grief," I think—Lisa, you know better.

Today feels as hollow as all the other birthdays, holidays, and angel days since Ellie died. This twenty-year milestone hasn't led me to any illuminating conclusion or deeper understanding of my psyche or my loss as I'd once hoped. I don't imagine it will at the 30-, 40- or 50-year mark. But in this loss, I have learned a lot about what it's like to live with grief.

Grief is metastatic. It lurks in dark corners, revealing itself in places you least expect it. I offer up a new metaphor—grief as a shapeshifter. I never know in quite what form it will come in, when it will hit, or how forceful it might strike. There isn't a part of my life that grief doesn't touch.

Grief is pain. I imagine it is akin to being hung, drawn, and quartered. But even those tortured souls have the deliverance of death. This pain—both physical and emotional—must be endured. I can attempt to escape my body with some vice or meditation, but I must always return to the reality that my child is gone. No pill or prayer makes it otherwise. When I sit with this realization, my body—inside and out—aches.

Grief is anger. I expected to be angry at God and disappointed in faith. I did not expect to feel such resentment toward parents who still got to hold their child. I expected to be angry at the circumstances surrounding Ellie's death. I did not expect to be angry at those I loved or for them to be the target of blame.

Grief is irrational. Turbulence on a plane, a tumble off a swing, a bit of food down the wrong pipe—are all cause for panic in this new reality where death hovers in a constant reminder that life can be ripped from us at any moment, from any cause. The slightest sound of chaos—kids wrestling upstairs or a loud voice in the next room jolts my brain back to the moment I heard heavy footsteps followed by the words, "Come quick—Ellie's not breathing!" Grief holds me hostage with the senses of memory.

Grief is unpredictable. There are no signposts for danger ahead. The shockwaves of loss can surface at any moment—listening to another bereaved parent share her story or when violence against children flashes across the television. Agony can strike when you least expect it—even in the middle of a sunny beach day, when the sight of a platinum-blond toddler resting her head on her mother's shoulder whisks me into a memory so strong I can't catch my breath.

Grief is imperceptible. Days when I fumble my speech, spill, or drop whatever's in my hands, I wonder if something is wrong with me. Then I remember—Ellie's birthday is in a few weeks or Mother's Day is a week away.

Grief is doubt. I read books about loss by "grief professionals" and parents who've walked in my shoes. Some helped, while others made me feel like a failure. Why didn't my grief align with the prescribed "stages?" How were other bereaved parents able to find a lesson in their loss? That wasn't part of my grief narrative. Neither was a stronger marriage. How had others managed to avoid the collateral damage strewn about an entire family? Had I gotten grief all wrong?

Grief is loss that begets more loss. Like when a marriage doesn't survive the tsunami of a child's death. Relationships with cracks split open into canyons. Divorce exacerbates grief, dispersing support circles and severing relationships. Family and friends have come and gone since Ellie's death. I've found that people are well-intentioned, but they don't understand—and they can't. It's not always them—it's me. I find it hard to relate to others who haven't experienced such severe loss, so I find myself retreating from the world.

Grief is guilt. And the guilt I carry is heavy. Mostly with the naïve thinking that something like this couldn't happen to someone like me. But the "what ifs" are the heaviest burdens. I am still learning how to forgive myself for not trying harder to change the trajectory of that horrible day.

And yet...

Grief is survival. People tell me I'm strong, but I'm not sure what that really means. They tell me they couldn't endure it if it happened to them—so what does that say about me if I can "endure"? I had two other daughters to raise and no choice but to hold it together for them. I did my best to hide my pain, but they heard me sobbing on the other side of the bedroom door and bravely asked if mommy was okay. Thankfully, they never saw what was sometimes on the other side—me, staring down at a bottle of pills, imagining my palm full of its contents. Their voices brought me back to reality. How selfish of me to add to their losses and cause more pain.

Grief is resilience. I had to rebuild trust in life and in others. After my divorce, becoming part of a blended family

continued on page 23

who didn't experience our loss was difficult. Holidays with family and friends who never knew Ellie are heartbreaking. Every December 19, my now husband doesn't wake up with the same heartache as I do, and it hurts not having someone to connect with in that way. And yet—he made sure to light Ellie's memorial tree before I got out of bed this morning.

"Grief is love," a bereaved mother recently reminded me. "It is the place where our love for our children exists." How right she is. My grief is a sign that Ellie lived. I am the keeper of her memories. The sharp lump in my throat when I see a mother cuddling her daughter, the pulse of sadness when I glance up at her big blue eyes in the portrait on my wall, and the glittering light from her memorial tree—these are ways grief brings Ellie to life for me.

My grief is not a journey. It is a shifting and morphing presence with me every day. Perhaps that's the realization I've come to twenty years after Ellie's death—accepting that grief is part of who I am and a beacon calling out my love for her.

Lisa L. Olney is a writer and teacher living in New Hampshire. A former chapter leader in Arizona and New Hampshire, Lisa is the mother of three girls, including her angel, Ellie, and stepmom to a son and daughter. Lisa is writing a memoir exploring the aftershocks of losing a child, and their effects on marriage and family. Lisa advocates for children's product safety in memory of Ellie. Learn more about Ellie's death here: <https://kidsindanger.org/family-voices/ellie/>

Perhaps that's the realization I've come to twenty years after Ellie's death—accepting that grief is part of who I am and a beacon calling out my love for her.

TCF Sibling Zoom Meetings

- SIB Suicide Support** - Meets 4th Monday of the month at 9:00 pm ET
- Meeting with Jordon** - Meets Tuesdays at 7:00 pm ET
- Grief Book Club** - Meets 1st Tuesday of the month at 7:30 pm ET
- Write Your Soul** - Meets 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm ET
- Meeting with Jason** - Meets Thursdays at 7:00 pm ET
- LGBTQ+ Sibs Meeting** - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursdays at 9:30 pm ET
- Canada Sibling Sharing Circle** - Meets 2nd Saturday of the month at 1:00 pm ET
- SIBS in Relationships and Partners** - Meets 2nd Sunday of the month at 7:00 pm ET



To sign up for TCF SIBS newsletter, visit siblingisland.com or scan the QR code.

Connect with Other Bereaved Parents, Grandparents, and Siblings Every Day on TCF's Online Support Community

The Compassionate Friends offers virtual support through an Online Support Community (live typed chats). This program was established to encourage connecting and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings (over the age of 18) grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

MONDAY

10 AM EST | 9 AM CST | 8 AM MST | 7 AM PST
(open depending on moderator availability)
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

10 PM EST | 9 PM CST | 8 PM MST | 7 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

TUESDAY

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
Loss to Substance Related Causes

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Bereaved Less than Three Years

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Bereaved More than Three Years

WEDNESDAY

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

THURSDAY

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
No Surviving Children

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

FRIDAY

10 AM EST | 9 AM CST | 8 AM MST | 7 AM PST
(open depending on moderator availability)
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

SATURDAY

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

SUNDAY

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
Suicide Loss

8 PM EST | 7 PM CST | 6 PM MST | 5 PM PST
Pregnancy/Infant Loss

9 PM EST | 8 PM CST | 7 PM MST | 6 PM PST
Parents/Grandparents/Siblings

Visit www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/online-support/ for more information and to register.

The Compassionate Friends Private Facebook Groups

The Compassionate Friends offers a variety of private Facebook Groups. These pages were established to encourage connection and sharing among parents, grandparents, and siblings grieving the death of a child, grandchild or sibling.

TCF – Loss of a Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofachild

TCF – Loss of a Stepchild

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofastepchild

TCF – Loss of a Grandchild

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofagrandchild

TCF – SIBS (for bereaved siblings)

facebook.com/groups/tcfsibs

TCF – Bereaved LGBTQ Parents With Loss of a Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflgbtqlossofachild

TCF – Multiple Losses

facebook.com/groups/tcfmultiplelosses

TCF – Men in Grief

facebook.com/groups/tcfmeningrief

TCF – Daughterless Mothers

facebook.com/groups/tcddaughterlessmothers

TCF – Grandparents Raising Their Grandchildren

facebook.com/groups/tcfgrandparentsraisinggc

TCF – Sudden Death

facebook.com/groups/tcfsuddendeadth

TCF – Loss To Substance Related Causes

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstosrc

TCF – Sibling Loss To Substance Related Causes

facebook.com/groups/tcfsiblinglossstosrc

TCF – Loss to Suicide

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstosuicide

TCF - Loss to Homicide

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstohomicide

TCF - Loss to Domestic Violence

facebook.com/groups/losstodomesticviolence

TCF – Loss of a Child With Special Needs

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchildwithspecialneeds

TCF – Loss to Long-Term Illness

facebook.com/groups/tcflosstolongtermillness

TCF – Loss to Mental Illness

facebook.com/groups/tcflosstomentalillness

TCF – Loss to a Drunk/Impaired Driver

facebook.com/groups/tcfdrunkimpaireddriver

TCF – Loss of a Medically Complex Child

facebook.com/groups/lossofamedicallycomplexchild

TCF – Loss Due to Drowning

facebook.com/groups/tcflosstodrowning

TCF - Loss to COVID-19 or Other Infectious Diseases

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstocovid19

TCF – Loss to Cancer

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstocancer

TCF – Loss to Miscarriage or Stillbirth

facebook.com/groups/tcflossstomiscarriagestillbirth

TCF – Miscarriage, Stillbirth, Loss of an Infant Grandchild

facebook.com/groups/miscarriagestillbirthinfantgrandchild

TCF - Infant and Toddler Loss

facebook.com/groups/tcfinfantandtoddlerloss

TCF - Loss of a Child 4 - 12 Years Old

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchild4to12

TCF – Loss of a Child 13-19 Years Old

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofchild13to19

TCF – Loss of an Adult Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofanadultchild

TCF – Loss of Your Only Child/All Your Children

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofonlychildallchildren

TCF - Loss of an LGBTQ+ Child

facebook.com/groups/tcflossofanlgbtqchild

TCF – Grieving the Loss of a Child as a Single Parent

facebook.com/groups/lossofachildasasingleparent

TCF – Bereaved Parents With Grandchild Visitation Issues

facebook.com/groups/tcfgrandchildvisitation

TCF – Inclusion and Diversity

facebook.com/groups/tcfinclusionanddiversity

TCF – Grieving with Faith and Hope

facebook.com/groups/grievingwithfaithandhope

TCF – Secular Support

facebook.com/groups/tcfsecularsupport

TCF – Finding Hope for Parents Through TCF SIBS

facebook.com/groups/tcffindinghopeforparents

TCF – Reading Your Way Through Grief

facebook.com/groups/tcfreadingthroughgrief

TCF – Crafty Corner

facebook.com/groups/tcfcraftycorner

The Compassionate Friends Chapter Leadership (for anyone currently serving on a Chapter steering committee)

www.facebook.com/groups/tcfchapterleadership/

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The Compassionate Friends

Worldwide Candle Lighting

Join us on December 8, 2024

“... that their light may always shine.”

The Compassionate Friends annual Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 p.m. local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon. The Worldwide Candle Lighting creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone.



We are excited to announce the dates for

Our 48th National Conference

July 11-13, 2025 in Bellevue, WA