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The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies
Oscoda Area Chapter

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The Compassionate Friends of
Oscoda Area
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Thanksgiving Marks Beginning of Holiday Madness and Sadness

In our society we have turned the holidays into a never ending round of parties, shopping, cooking, preparations for guests or travel and stress, lots and lots of stress. It begins in October with the not so subtle reminders from our friendly retail stores. Most of us dread this time of year because as members of Compassionate Friends, we have one more item on our list and it invariably is at the top.....my child is gone.....how can I handle the holidays?

This will be my third Thanksgiving without my son. We had 35 wonderful Thanksgiving celebrations together, and now it's just me. My only child is gone, my grandchildren now live solely in their mother's world. I am not a part of that world.

But I am learning to cope with this reality. I am learning that I can hold on to the traditions that don't cause me sadness and let go of those that do. As bereaved parents we fall into a unique category. As humans we accept that the loss of parents, spouses, aunts, uncles, siblings, friends and acquaintances is inevitable. But never, never, were we taught or conditioned to the idea that our children would or could precede us in death. The very notion of this shook us to our core.

Now we have lost our child to death. Nobody prepared us for this mind numbing loss. The rules have been broken. We have no coping skills. Our friends usually can't help. Our families try, but until one endures a loss of this magnitude, the ability to fully comprehend the never ending rounds of sadness is simply not there.

We do have a support system.....we can choose to participate or simply be there, in the moment, at our Compassionate Friends meetings. Here we find our most meaningful and helpful connection with other parents.....parents who are walking the road we now walk. These bereaved parents are here to help us on this unfamiliar road. They cannot answer every question because the answers don't exist to most questions. When will this pain end? When will life go back to "normal"? There are different types of pain and new kinds of normal. We gather each month to help each other, to lean on each other, to find hope in each other's ability to function. From this meeting of kindred souls we do derive some solace, some peace and some hope.

I have watched the newly bereaved, raw in their sadness when they first attend a meeting. As the months move forward, I begin to see a change in these parents. Each changes in a different way, for each experiences their loss and their grief process in a different way. Some changes aren't apparent for months, even a year or two. Learning that we are not alone in the grievous burden of our loss is comforting. Learning that others have developed ways to cope with the holidays, the birthdays, the death anniversaries and other special occasions gives us the hope that we, too, will one day feel comfortable in our new "normal."

I have chosen to accept this group of gentle, kind and compassionate friends as an integral part of my life. The first holidays were horrible. I learned that I had to do what I felt was right. I learned to let go of the expectations of others and live in the moment. Even if I plan to do something and change my mind, I feel no guilt. I learned that those who truly love me understand. I have found that I am truly becoming myself....my new self. It is a slow process. There are setbacks.

Holidays are extremely difficult for every parent who has lost a child.....it matters not how long ago our child died. The pain is fresh, new and raw at this time of year. This is the season for leaning on our compassionate friends, for asking questions, expressing fears, anxieties, doubts, depression and anger and for finding the comfort, hope and understanding that each of us so desperately seeks.

~Annette Mennen Baldwin,
In memory of her son, Todd Mennen
TCF Katy,

MONTHLY MEETING

2nd Tuesday of the Month
Sacred Heart Church Family Center
5300 N US 23
Oscoda, MI 48750

Meeting time: 7:00 pm

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 14:

*Thankful & Candle
Painting for WWC Lighting*

December 10:

World Wide Candle Lighting

December 12:

Keep the Lights Burning

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP

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“You Need Not Walk Alone”

THE SIBING CORNER

This corner is dedicated to siblings together adjusting to grief through encouragement & sharing

10 THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SIBLINGS & GRIEF

BY DR. CHRISTINA HIBBERT

Dr.Hibbert is a psychologist and has lost two sisters..check out more information on grief at www.drchristinahibbert.com

There are many things people need to learn about siblings and grief. Here are ten I would like everyone to know.

Sibling grief is often misunderstood—by parents, families, friends, and counselors, even by the siblings themselves. So much focus is given to the parents of the lost child, to the children of the lost parent, to the spouse of the lost adult sibling. And, rightly so. But, what about the siblings? What about the ones who, like me, have grown up with the deceased? Who believed they would have a lifetime with their sister or brother? Who now face that lifetime alone?

Sibling grief “has been almost entirely overlooked in the literature on bereavement.” It’s no wonder, therefore, that even mental health providers misunderstand sibling grief. How are families supposed to know how to help siblings through grief if even the research on the subject is lacking?

Common emotions siblings may feel when a brother or sister dies include: guilt, abandonment, loss of innocence, fallout from the family, somatic symptoms, fears and anxiety.

Siblings may feel “trumped” by the grief of other family members. I sure felt this way, and it’s common, since the focus is usually on the parents if a young sibling dies and on the surviving spouse or children if an older sibling dies. This may lead to minimizing a sibling’s own loss.

Young siblings lose innocence when a brother or sister dies, which may lead to fears and anxiety; “Survivor guilt” is also common. Experiencing death as a child becomes a lifelong experience of processing and understanding the loss. Children grow up with grief, understanding more as they get older. Fear of death or dying is common. Anxiety or worry about getting sick may become prevalent. In young siblings, guilt for provocative behavior or for unacceptable feelings (jealousy) is common. Young children may think, before the death, “I wish my brother were dead!” then believe they somehow caused it to happen. Older siblings may wonder, “Why them and not me?” Because siblings are usually similar in age, it can bring up many questions about the sibling’s own life and death, and guilt along with it.

Surviving children do, unfortunately, end up taking the fallout from parents’, siblings’, or other family members’ mistakes, emotional blowups, or neglect. In many ways, siblings often experience a double loss: the loss of their sister or brother, and the loss of their parents (at least for a time, but sometimes, permanently). I know this from experience. Though my parents did the best they could, after my youngest sister died, our entire family was different. My mom retreated into her own grief, staying in her room, depressed and sick for years. My dad retreated into work and anything to take his mind from his pain. Luckily, I was already on my own, in college, at the time; my younger siblings weren’t so lucky. At 9, 11, 14, and 17 years old, they grew up with a completely different set of parents than I had. I tried to step in as a “parent” figure over the years, but the separation from my parents in their time of need profoundly influenced their lives. It profoundly influenced *my* life. It profoundly changed our family.

Siblings may manifest somatic symptoms of grief, including symptoms that mimic the deceased sibling’s symptoms. Especially in young children, symptoms like stomachaches, headaches, nightmares, body pain, digestive symptoms, and trouble sleeping are common. These should be seen as symptoms of grief, and hopefully, an adult in the family can help siblings work through their feelings and show them how to grieve.

Having someone explain the loss to younger siblings, to be there for them and help them grieve, is ideal. Little children don’t comprehend death in the same way adults do. It is therefore important to have somebody who can walk them through the loss and the grief process, to explain it wasn’t their fault, to validate what they feel. If parents aren’t able to do so, another family member or friend may, and hopefully will, step in.

Even adult siblings will feel the loss deeply. The pain isn’t less simply because you’re older. In fact, in many ways, it’s harder. You understand more. You know what it means to die, and you will feel the pain of the loss in a different way than young children, who still haven’t developed abstract thinking and understanding, will. Grieve your loss.

My best advice for siblings in grief: Feel the loss as long as you need to, and give yourself time to heal. Because sibling loss is so misunderstood, you may receive messages that make you feel like you should be “over it by now.” They don’t know sibling loss. Now, you do. It takes time. Lots of time. It’s not about “getting over” the loss of a sibling. You don’t get over it. You create your life and move on, when you’re ready. But you will always remember your brother or sister—the missing piece of your life.

Sibling Corner Continued:

I once heard someone say, "When a parent dies, you lose the past. When a child dies, you lose the future. When a sibling dies, you lose the past *and* the future." That is the grief of a sibling—grief for what was past, and grief for what should have been the future. Just remember these things, my friends. Remember to be there for siblings in grief. You can be the difference in helping them create a bright future, even if they now must do so without their beloved sibling.



The Compassionate Friends

Worldwide Candle Lighting

Join us on December 10, 2017

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. As candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time, creating a virtual wave of light, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor the memory of children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries. Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the Worldwide Candle Lighting, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

Our local chapter will be holding its 3rd Annual Candlelight Remembrance Program at Sacred Heart Church Family Center, 5300 N US 23, Oscoda. We ask that everyone arrive by 6:45 as we will light our candles outside at 7:00. Clarita, This very touching evening includes live music, readings and lighting of candles outside and inside. We follow with refreshments and social time. The holiday season is an extremely difficult time of year for families grieving the death of a child. This candle lighting ceremony is a symbolic way of showing the love we continue to carry for our children, even though they can no longer be with us physically. Please invite your friends, neighbors, and relatives to come and share with you this very moving celebration of all children who have died.



'Twas the Night Before Christmas

- for bereaved parents
by Faye McCord TCF (UK)

'Twas the month before Christmas and I dreaded the days, That I
knew I was facing - the holiday craze.
The stores were all filled with holiday lights,
In hopes of drawing customers by day and by night.
As others were making their holiday plans,
My heart was breaking - I couldn't understand.
I had lost my dear child a few years before,
And I knew what my holiday had in store.
When out of nowhere, there arose such a sound,
I sprang to my feet and was looking around,
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash
The sight that I saw took my breath away,
And my tears turned to smiles in the light of the day.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a cluster of butterflies fluttering near.
With beauty and grace they performed a dance,
I knew in a moment this wasn't by chance.
The hope that they gave me was a sign from above,
That my child was still near me and that I was loved.
The message they brought was my holiday gift,
And I cried when I saw them in spite of myself.
As I knelt closer to get a better view,
One allowed me to pet it - as if it knew -
That I needed the touch of its fragile wings,
To help me get through the holiday scene.
In the days that followed I carried the thought,
Of the message the butterflies left in my heart -
That no matter what happens or what days lie ahead,
Our children are with us - they're not really dead.
Yes, the message of the butterflies still rings in my ears,
A message of hope - a message so dear.
And I imagined they sang as they flew out of sight,
"To all bereaved parents - We love you tonight!"





*"Forever In Our Hearts"
Our Children/Siblings Remembered*



Birthdays



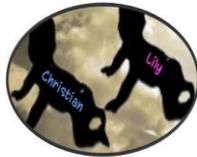
Remembrances



**November
Michael Wright**



**November
Lily & Christian**



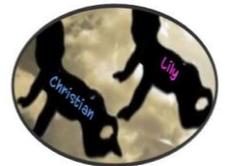
**November
Devin James**



**November
Aaron Dean**



**November
Lily & Christian**



In the end, all we have left are memories. Bits and pieces of the time we've spent together. No matter how long the time was. It'll never seem like enough....

Maud Berben



**November
Ronald Lewis**



The mission of The Compassionate Friends: 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.



Empty Stocking

Each Christmas we had stocking stuffers. Our son, Tyler, died at age 17 after a riding accident. I broke down that first Christmas when I put his up and realized I didn't need to put stocking stuffers in it. I started writing a letter to him, about a page long, and sticking it in there. I just tell him in the letter how much I love him. This tradition continues today.

~Vicki Blount, Enid Oklahoma



Coping with Grief During the Holidays --Vitas Health care

“Who’s going to carve the turkey this year now that Grandpa has died?”
“I don’t have the energy or desire to shop, to decorate, or to be around others this year at Christmas.”
“I just want to erase Chanukah this year. I’ll just feel too empty without my husband to celebrate.”

Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, Ramadan, Kwanza and New Year’s Day are annual holidays that can be a very difficult time for people who have experienced the death of someone loved. Memories of good times and togetherness at the holiday season serve to remind us of our loss. Watching others who are feeling thankful and are celebrating when we feel overwhelmed, lonely or sad can be very painful. Holidays force us to realize how much our lives have been changed by the loss of our loved one. Particularly in the first year, many bereaved are left with having to develop new holiday rituals and traditions. The first step in coping with grief at the holidays is to acknowledge that the first holiday season is difficult and then to prepare for it in advance by making specific plans and obtaining the support that you need. Remember too, that sometimes anticipation of a holiday can be more difficult than the day itself.

Some Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays

Set realistic expectations for yourself. Remind yourself that this year is different. Decide if you can still handle the responsibilities you’ve had in the past. Examine the tasks and events of celebrating and ask yourself if you want to continue them. Take others up on offers to cook, shop, decorate, etc. Consider shopping by phone, Internet or catalogs this year.

Surround yourself with people who love and support you. Share your plans with family and friends and let them know of any intended changes in holiday routine. Memories can sometimes be a source of comfort to the bereaved. Share your memories with others of holidays spent with your loved one by telling stories and looking at photo albums.

Try to avoid “canceling” the holiday despite the temptation. It is OK to avoid some circumstances that you don’t feel ready to handle, but don’t isolate yourself. Allow yourself some time for solitude, remembering and grieving, but balance it with planned activities with others.

Allow yourself to feel joy, sadness, anger – allow yourself to grieve. It is important to recognize that every family member has his/her own unique grief experience and may have different needs related to celebrating the holidays. No one way is right or wrong. Experiencing joy and laughter does not mean you have forgotten your loved one.

Draw comfort from doing for others. Consider giving a donation or gift in memory of you loved one. Invite a guest who might otherwise be alone for the holidays. Adopt a needy family during the holiday season.

Take care of yourself. Avoid using alcohol to self-medicate your mood. Try to avoid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Physical exercise is often an antidote for depression. Writing in a journal can be a good outlet for your grief. Buy yourself something frivolous that you always wanted but never allowed yourself to indulge in.

Create a new tradition or ritual that accommodates your current situation. Some people find comfort in the old traditions. Others find them unbearably painful. Discuss with your family the activities you want to include or exclude this year. Some examples of new rituals and traditions include:

- Announce beforehand that someone different will carve the turkey.
- Create a memory box. You could fill it with photos of your loved one or written memory notes from family members and friends. Young children could include their drawings in the memory box.
- Make a decorative quilt using favorite colors, symbols or images that remind you of the person who died.
- Light a candle in honor of your absent loved one.
- Put a bouquet of flowers on your holiday table in memory of your loved one.
- Visit the cemetery and decorate the memorial site with holiday decorations.
- Have a moment of silence during a holiday toast to honor your loved one.
- Place a commemorative ornament on the Christmas tree.
- Dedicate one of the Chanukah candles in memory of your loved one.
- Write a poem about your loved one and read it during a holiday ritual.
- Play your loved one’s favorite music or favorite game.
- Plan a meal with your loved ones’ favorite foods.



The most important thing to remember is there is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holiday season after the death of a loved one, and that the best way to cope with that first holiday season is to plan ahead, get support from others and take it easy.

Books on Grief and the Holidays

James Miller, *How Will I Get Through the Holidays? Twelve Ideas for Those Whose Loved One Has Died*
Drs. Clarence Tucker and Cliff Davis, *Holiday Blues—A Self-Help Manual on Grief Through the Holidays*



Holiday Aches

Printed from "Where Are All The Butterflies" with permission.

After the first few holiday seasons after my daughter's death, I thought I had licked the holiday doldrums. After all, two, three, four years had passed. I was unprepared for the dull ache I battled throughout the holidays in 1993; however, it didn't dawn on me until the middle of January why.

December 1993 was the first time since 1989 that both my surviving sons and their families, my step-daughter and her family had been all together during the holidays. I had been looking forward to having them all home at the same time once again. The cousins (all my grandchildren) would be able to renew acquaintances, and I could watch their interaction with interest and glee.

Yet all during the season, I was plagued with a longing, an all too familiar ache. I missed my daughter's presence. Her widowed husband had remarried in May that year, and he and his new wife were also included in our family gathering. I liked his new wife very much. But I suppose subconsciously, I was reminded even more of my daughter's absence. As I wrote my Christmas letter to my daughter Teri and put it into her Christmas stocking, unbidden tears chased themselves down my cheeks. I pushed my thoughts away from sadness; I reminded myself how lucky we were to have known and loved her, and to know and love her still.

Later I realized what should have been obvious to me during the holidays. Although our family was altogether, it wasn't the same as it used to be. Teri was missing from the scene. It's one thing to hold her spirit in our hearts and minds, and quite another to have her sitting in her usual place at the table or leading us in Christmas carols.

We all missed her, even after nearly eight years; and we talked about her often. We had a wonderful holiday together that I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I hope we will have many more such reunions. Next time, though, I'll be wiser. I'll know why the ache is there, why the joy is tempered slightly and why as long as I live my life and our family's life together, will be forever altered. The difference will always be noticeable, I imagine. But then, the difference Teri has made in each of our lives is and always will be obvious too.



As you shop for the Holidays keep us in mind.

Support
The Compassionate Friends
Of Oscoda Area 2440
When you shop at smile.amazon.com
Amazon donates
Go to: <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/35-2493920>

amazon smile

iGive is an amazingly simple, no cost to you, donation platform. Check it out at

<https://igive.com/TheCompassionateFriendsofOscodaArea>



Check out the over 1,000 on-line stores that when you shop donate money to TCF

<https://www.igive.com/html/merchantlist2.cfm>

**The Compassionate Friends of Oscoda Area
3rd Annual Worldwide Candle Lighting**



Sunday December 10, 2017

6:45 pm

Sacred Heart Church Family Center

5300 North US 23, Oscoda, MI

This event is an opportunity for families, as well as extended family and friends, to come together to honor the memories of our children, siblings and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit at 7:00 pm local time, hundreds of thousands of persons commemorate and honor these children creating a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone.

Please come and join us in this celebration of life!

Please bring a framed photo or memento to display on our sharing table

Program includes reading of names, music, readings, lighting of candles, followed with refreshments and visiting.

To RSVP or for more information email us at tcfoscoda@gmail.com and on Facebook