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

The Compassionate Friends of
Oscoda Area
4087 Forest Rd.
Oscoda, MI 48750
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Issue 80 January/February 2025

Monthly Meetings

2nd Tuesday of the Month
Sacred Heart Church Family Center
5300 N US 23
Oscoda, MI 48750
Meeting time 7:00 pm

**If Oscoda Area Schools is closed due
to weather our meeting is canceled.**

January 14th @ 7 pm

February 11th @ 7pm

March 11th @ 7 pm

You need not walk alone!

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP

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The Compassionate Friends Oscoda Area

Co-Leaders: Fran Ommani
Charlie Negro
Secretary: Charlie Negro
Treasurer: Jane Negro
Outreach: Tracey Toppa
Director: Vicky Stadler

REGIONAL COORDINATOR



Gail Lafferty
734-306-3930

Kathy Rambo
734-748-2514

In The Glow of Freshly Fallen Snow

Last night, in the glow of freshly fallen snow,
I felt for the first time in months a sense of
peace.

A feeling of wonder overcame me
And I looked around to see if you were there.

Later, I thought to myself—
“Why did I need to look?”

I know, as surely as I know how to breathe,
That you are with me always.

You are closer to me now
Then ever before and the only difference
Is that instead of opening my eyes to see you,
Now I must open my heart.

~Sandi Goodman
“Love Never Dies”

Grief is like a snowflake...

sometimes it comes one flake
at a time;

other times it comes like a
blizzard.

It melts away,
but it always comes back,
just as each snowflake is
unique;

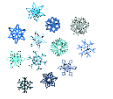
each person experiences grief
in their own unique way.

-Julia Cook

www.affectinggrace.com/articles.org



Snowflakes



Have you ever stood outside, with your head tilted back and your mouth open wide, trying to catch a snowflake? Snowflakes fall everywhere—on your hair, your chin, your eyelashes, even your nose, and some even manage to land on the very tip of your tongue, only to vanish before you can really get a taste.

Each snowflake is a completely different design and pattern. No two are ever created exactly the same. It is a mystery that continues to delight “snow catchers” everywhere. There are very few things that can be so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different and disappear so quickly, never to be reproduced in exactly the same pattern again.

Sometimes it seems as though people are like that, too. Those we love are so lovely, so delicate, so perfect, so different and they disappeared too quickly, too. Each of us is as unique as those snowflakes. We each have a unique look, sound, smell, touch. We are cut from unique patterns, assembled in an endless variety of shapes, styles, combinations. We look, sound, talk, think and act differently than anyone else. There are no identical matches just as there are no perfectly identical snowflakes.

We know this, but when it comes to grieving, we often demand that everyone grieve the same way. Some of us will talk our way through the iciness of our grief, while others prefer more solitude. Some want to read everything they can about grief, while others wish to submerge themselves in work. Some cry endlessly, while others never shed tears. We are as unique as snowflakes drifting from the sky.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve, although there are some ways that are a bit less dramatic. Just as the snowflakes find their way to their destination, so too will each of us find our own way through grief. Frozen hearts and numb minds do, eventually, thaw. Icy memories that chill to the bone can grow warmer as we begin to move through our grief.

Whatever hurt we are carrying begins to weave itself into our very being and eventually it becomes a part of our history. We begin to become the sum total of all of our experiences. Our unique pattern begins to reflect our unique journey. We carry souvenirs of our hurts, each stored away until time to add them to the next hurt, thus piling up one hurt after another, all to be carried forever in our being. These hurts leave scars, some big, some small, but all significant in their pain. Each scar must have a place in our being. We become a carefully organized mass of layers, as delicate and intricate and individual as a snowflake.

Sometimes, especially in the early months and even years of grief, all we can remember is the pain and horribleness of our loved one's death. Pain seems to overshadow everything. These shadows seem to make every day harder, and in winter the shadows seem longer, deeper, darker. The snowflakes seem small, less beautiful. The magic of winter's decorations only leaves us cold and barren.

If we begin as frozen beings, the journey through grief becomes a process of thawing. And each of us will defrost in a pattern as unique and individual as the snowflakes that drift across the windowpane, leaving little icy streaks of memory on the heart.

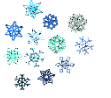
So, be patient with yourself this winter season. Recognize your own unique emotions and hurts and learn to identify the tracings of your own snowflakes of grief. You will survive these winter days and this winter season. You will begin to defrost eventually, and it will be far less painful if you will begin to cherish your differences rather than use them as weapons and yardsticks of judgment.

-----January 2010

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Darcie D. Sims, Ph.D., CHT, Ct, GMS, is a bereaved parent and child, a grief management specialist, a nationally certified thanatologist and pastoral bereavement specialist, and a licensed psychotherapist.

She is an internationally recognized speaker, and she wrote regularly for Bereavement magazine for fifteen years. She has been writing for Grief Digest magazine since its first issue.





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



Birthdays



Remembrances



January

Derek Toppa



January

Jake Katzenberger



January

Tony Calabrese



January

Katie Kirkpatrick



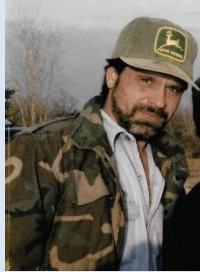
February

Ashely Scott



February

Jerry Brunk



January

Audree Ball



January

Daniel Cleary



*Grief is like a snowflake
Each snowflake is different
And everyone shows grief
differently.
Some cry on the outside
And some cry on the inside.
Julia Cook*

January

Armani N. Kelly



January

Tommy Draper



**Just like snowflakes,
sometimes grief
comes in one flake at
a time. Other times,
it's a blizzard.
Eluna Network**



February

Casey May Whitney



*Like snowflakes
Your words fall silent
But my heart still
Hears your voice.
~Angie Weiloand-Crosby*



Coping with Grief: Eleanor Haley-- May 2018

Imagine you're talking to a close friend who is grieving, and she tells you she's frustrated because she doesn't think she's coping well. You know she has made many active efforts to constructively cope, such as attending a support group and journaling about her grief and you believe she has been doing as well as can be expected, but she feels like she has been making very little progress.

She wonders whether she is strong enough to handle her grief and compares herself to others in her grief support group, who she believes are coping better than she is. Keeping in mind this friend typically appreciates feedback - what would you say to her?

Take a few minutes to think about it...doot doo doo...think think think...aaaaaaaand we're back.

So, what did you say to your friend? I'm guessing most of your responses were compassionate, supportive, and encouraging. Am I right? I bet I'm right.

Now, I want you to think about a time when *you* were the frustrated and self-critical grieving person. Even if the content of your criticism was different, self-reproach was the same.

What, at that time, did you say to yourself? Did you show yourself the same support and encouragement that you gave to your hypothetical friend above? Were you even *open* to your own self-kindness and compassion? If the answer to this question is, "*No, I was not kind to myself*", you are definitely not alone.

It's puzzling, isn't it? Why do we respond to our friends with understanding, patience, and compassion, but we respond to ourselves as though we were hard-nosed football coaches running drills before the big game?

You call that grieving? At this rate, you'll never feel better! Now take a lap!

If you think about it, most of us are taught to be kind to others at a very early age, but lessons about being kind to oneself are far less overt. This is an unfortunate reality because self-compassion has been linked to greater levels of things like increased resilience and well-being and lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress.

As prominent self-compassion researcher and author Kristin Neff has written, "If you are continually judging and criticizing yourself while trying to be kind to others, you are drawing artificial boundaries and distinctions that only lead to feelings of separation and isolation."

Self-compassion is useful and important, especially during times of difficulty and suffering. Sadly, I worry many people won't even make it past the title of this article because they dismiss it as buzzwordy, or because they confuse self-compassion with things like self-indulgence or self-pity. But self-compassion is not the same as pitying or indulging oneself. It's not self-centered, it's not weak, and it's not letting yourself get away with things without a second thought.

So... what is self-compassion?

Glad you asked! One thing psychologists must do when researching and applying a concept is define and describe it. Sometimes these definitions closely match our understanding of the term in broader society, and sometimes they are a little different.

So, you may have your own ideas about what self-compassion and self-kindness mean, but when we refer to self-compassion, we're referring to it as it's defined by Kristin Neff who is quoted above. You can explore this concept a little on your own, but we will briefly discuss it as it relates to grief below.

Self-compassion is made up of 3 parts...

1. Self-Kindness:

Showing self-kindness means being understanding, accepting, and compassionate towards oneself, rather than harsh and critical. Self-kindness does *not* require a person to ignore their suffering or to immediately let themselves off the hook for their wrongdoing. Instead, it asks people to approach experiences like these with a more flexible, open, and understanding stance as opposed to one of shame and condemnation.

For many, self-kindness is easy to understand, but hard to live. People often feel their self-criticism is what keeps them in line. They fear that without it they won't know when they've done something wrong or push themselves to be as good and productive as they can possibly be. But there's no evidence to support this notion and such self-criticism can create stress for the person and undermine their sense of self-confidence and capability.

Grief is an overwhelming experience that challenges a person to cope while simultaneously juggling a complex and complicated life filled with jobs, bills, housework, parenting, friends, family, etc. To make things even more challenging, grief sometimes involves feelings of guilt, regret, shame, low self-esteem, and loss of identity.

Quite often people find themselves struggling with thoughts like - "*I'm not strong enough to deal with this.*" "*I don't know who I am anymore.*" "*I should be feeling better right now.*" "*I wasn't a good wife/husband/son/daughter/etc.*" "*The death was my fault*" So, grieving people should be especially mindful of their self-critical voice and how loud it has become.

2. A Sense of Common Humanity:

Acknowledging our common humanity doesn't deny our differences, rather it asks people to focus instead on how we are the same. It may seem abstract to some, but for others, it may be comforting to remember that suffering and imperfections are a part of the broader human experience.

Everyone suffers, everyone is imperfect, so we are not abnormal, wrong, or different when we experience these things and we do not need to isolate, separate, or hide. I think this is especially relevant to grief because almost everyone will experience the death of a loved one at some point in their lives, but people often get caught up in thinking about how their experiences differ.

Take WYG (What's Your Grief blog & website) for example, we often talk about how grief feels different for everyone, and no two people grieve in the exact same way. We also often hear people comparing their losses, measuring their suffering against another, or saying, "*no one understands me (us)*".

While we don't deny the fact that no one can *fully understand* another person's pain, my question would be, what purpose does focusing on these differences serve other than to further isolate and separate? When we focus on our common humanity, we see that, although I don't know the depths, colors, and shapes of your pain, I do know that you are suffering because I have suffered too.

3. Mindfulness:

I won't dive too deeply into mindfulness because this is a bigger concept, but we've written [about it here](#). Mindfulness fits into the bigger picture of self-compassion because one must be present with their experiences and emotions in order to offer themselves kindness and compassion.

Just like the friend who runs away at the first sign of a tearful lip quiver, if you can't be present with your own grief, then how can you acknowledge it and offer yourself understanding?

Well, I've managed to use up all our time talking about the concept of self-compassion without offering you any actual tools. That's okay, another post for another day. In the meantime, I want to challenge you all to show yourself kindness and compassion by following the (very simple) acronym below.

B - Be kind to yourself. We've already discussed this one.

R - Respect your body by not overindulging alcohol, drugs, and bad food; by getting enough sleep, and by moving around at least a little every day.

E - Engage with others in big and/or small ways. We're not asking you to bloom into a social butterfly or anything. Just try not to isolate. If you haven't been around other people in a while, go to the local coffee shop or go out for a walk and wave to your neighbors.

A - Allow your emotions to ebb and flow. Don't run from them.

Expect that grief emotions will bubble up, their intensity will rise, and they will wash over you and recede.

T - Take life one minute, hour, and day at a time. The enormity of what it means to live life without your loved one is overwhelming, but remember that coping with grief is something that happens bit-by-bit and day-by-day

H - Allow yourself space and time to remember, honor, and to connect with your loved one's memory and their continued impact on the world.

E - Your critical voice has a lot of expectations about what grief *should* be like and how you *should* cope. Remember, there are very few "*shoulds*" when it comes to coping with grief. Everyone copes in their own way and at their own pace. So, give yourself a break.

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BREATHE

Be kind to yourself

Respect your body

Engage with others

Allow emotions to ebb and flow

Take life one minute at a time

Honor your loved one

Examine your expectations

February

Let this cool and
gentle
month of the heart
remind you
not only
of lost
treasures,
but also, of riches
(past and present)
in your life.
~Sascha Wagner



Valentine's Day

It is that time again. February 14 is approaching. If your sad heart has been in mothballs, it is time to air it out and use it. We all miss the darling little valentines from our children and the buying of heart candies and various ways we showed our love for each other. But we still have all those precious memories. You say you've lost the feeling; you feel nothing inside. Valentine's Day has lost its meaning for you. I remember the love I felt for my son. I still have the capacity to give love to someone else.

Love is still there waiting inside us, ready to give whenever the occasion demands it. It's selfish and self-centered not to use it. In fact, love has to be given from the heart to be replenished, just like blood; it comes right back! So, if we don't continue to give it, we're filled with lonely feelings, empty thoughts, and NO valentines. Love begets love; it is that simple. Someone you care for would be delighted to receive your valentine. You know and I know this to be true. Go make your valentine list and send those love missiles flying in all directions!

~Gloria Gersten,
TCF Miami



A Dozen Roses

If I had a dozen roses I know just what I'd do
I'd give each one a name that reminded me of you

The first rose I'd name sunshine cause you
brightened everyday

The second would be beauty,
the kind that never goes away

The third one would be priceless
like those hugs you gave me

I'd name the fourth rose silly
oh how funny you could be

Rose five of course is patience,
something you have helped me find

The sixth rose I'd call memories
the precious gift left behind

The seventh and the eighth rose
would for sure be faith and grace

Nine would be unique
because no one can take your place

The tenth rose well that's easy
I'd simple name it love

Eleven I'd call Angel
I know you're watching from above

I'd think about that twelfth rose and
I'd really take my time

After all these roses are for you my Valentine
I'm sending them to heaven in every color that I know

So, number twelve I'll name forever,
that's how long I'll love you so

*~Alan Pedersen
~Past Executive of The National Compassionate Friends*



Hope in the Face of Death

Hope and beautiful memories. Hope brings us new possibilities. It opens dead end streets, it allows for change, and in change it creates new alternatives. Hope encourages optimism. It assures us that, although situations aren't how we would like them to be, circumstances could change for the better. Hope has changed societies, developed science, and enhanced life since the beginning.

Happily, the human mind has a way of storing beautiful moments...this forms a storehouse of memories that is always there to call upon, even at times of extreme despair.

*~Leo F. Buscaglia
~TCF South BA, LA*

