



The Compassionate Friends

Quad City Area Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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Dear Compassionate Friends,

Father's Day. Over the last 17 years, alike to Mother's Day for Laurie, it has been a mixed, bittersweet celebration. We are most grateful for the three sons with whom we have been blessed and who have grown into bright, extraordinary adults who grace our lives as friends and foils. But over those same years, we have marked the days that we have been without our youngest child, our only daughter who died in her sixth year. She differed from her brothers not only in gender, but also in temperament and volume. She was loud and defiant; her brothers, quiet and easy-going. She dominated the space of our home with a personality that blended mirth with willfulness, for while she may have been the last to join the family, it was her intent to lead it, or at least make known the direction she thought best. Since she left us, our home and neighborhood have been much quieter, more sedate, less exciting. Life has gone on without the benefit of this little fire brand who would now be 23, most likely finished with college, and making plans to conquer a larger world. Our five lives haven't been able to fill the void that her absence created. We are left wondering what would have been, who she would be in adulthood, how our lives could have been different.

This Father's Day, I know I am not the only dad who has these thoughts and emotions. In the Ukraine, in Uvalde, in so many parts of our violent world, there are fathers and mothers who now carry the life-long grief of losing one or more of their children. For many, that grief is new and heart-rending. For others, it has grown into a constant, familiar companion, always there, having worked its way into the very fiber of our lives. It is the "If only," "What would be" statements with which we parents-who-have-lost live. But it is also a defiant refusal to allow death to extinguish our love, our bond, our link with the child we birthed

My daughter is not forgotten; all the children for whom we compassionate friends grieve live on in each one of us. Not forgotten; always cherished.

Sincerely,
Bill and Laurie Steinhauer



I held you close in my heart today. I felt complete. You may have died, but you are not gone. You'll always be a part of me.
Unknown

When one day at a time seems too long, try just one minute at a time.
Kristin Thompson, TCF/Nashville, TN

The importance of meeting your basic needs is often overlooked when your entire world has been shattered to pieces. The scope of what you're dealing with is so ginormous, who can be bothered to think about something like getting enough sleep? But if you are able to meet some of your most basic needs, you'll be in a better position physically and emotionally to deal with your other more complex and nuanced stressors. Plus, in a world that now seems to lack rhyme or reason, taking care of your basic needs is often one of the few and/or first things you can manage.

Eleanor Haley – whatsyourgrief.com

Losing my son was more than losing a piece of me. My son thought of me as his hero. He said he wanted to be the dad I was for him when he has his own kids. I failed him. I couldn't be the hero he thought I was. The natural instinct to protect one's offspring runs through virtually every species on earth. And I failed to protect my son. There is nothing I can do now except share his story. The weight of loss never goes away, we just learn how to carry it.

Dan Noordman – whatsyourgrief.com

If this is your first vacation since your child died, you may find you really don't want to go at all, but feel pressured by previous commitments or other children's needs. Try to leave yourself an escape route. Go – but with the understanding that if it's too much, you can come home. Just having that agreed to ahead of time and knowing that choice is available to you may make it an easier time for you.

Mary Cleckley, TCF/Atlanta, GA



What I Have Learned from the Death of My Son: A Letter to Grieving Parents

I believe losing a child is the hardest loss there is, but I hope what I have learned from the death of my son can help you in some small way.

To the parents reading this who have lost a child, I wish I could hug you and make the pain go away, but unfortunately, nobody can. I want to tell you that the pain goes away, that time heals, that one day you wake up, and that ache is gone, the piece of your soul that was ripped out fills in, but I would be lying. Frankly, I don't want the pain to disappear, because the grief I feel is proof that I loved deeply; I loved my son unconditionally. For 15 years, I was able to see him grow. I held him, dried his tears, and healed his scrapes. I even helped keep the imaginary monsters at bay.

Unfortunately, I couldn't keep the real monsters at bay: suicide and depression. I try to focus on the time I had with him, but honestly, it doesn't always work. A wise man once told me that when we lose a loved one, we not only lose them, we grieve for the life we were supposed to have with them. I have found this to be incredibly accurate.

What I can tell you is the ache does, to an extent, dissipate. In the beginning, you feel like you are drowning. As time passes, the waves of grief are a little less, then lesser still. The days I am wholly engulfed are fewer than before, but I will forever grieve my son and the life he was supposed to have, along with the life I was supposed to have with him.

For the moms and dads just starting on this horrific journey, here are some things I want to share:

1. Be kind to yourself. You have suffered an incredible loss, one I believe is the worst loss a person can experience. It will be

incredibly difficult. You will feel many things—that is normal—you may also feel like you are going crazy, but you are not. In fact, many of us feel the same way.

2. Be patient. It will take time.

3. Getting to a better place takes work. I promise it is worth it.

4. If you can, join a support group. We attend an in-person group, but I realize that not everyone can make it to a physical meeting. If you can't join a face-to-face group, find a supportive one online. Losing a child is a special grief and only those who have lost a child can understand. Those who haven't lost a child will try to understand, but they will be unable to. If the group that you join is not supportive, leave, and find a different one. This is absolutely critical. Never be afraid to find a group that works for you. There is nothing wrong with you if you join a group that doesn't work; it just doesn't fit your needs at the moment. One thing I would like to advise: Give it at least three weeks. Sometimes the first week is tough, and it may take multiple weeks to really understand the dichotomy of the group.



Give yourself that time unless it is an abusive situation. If that is the case, immediately leave and do not look back.

5. If you can, seek one-on-one counseling. I understand that counseling may not be for everyone, but having someone that you can talk to about anything, especially your child, can be a huge comfort. Many counselors will listen without judgment and will try to help you navigate the peaks and valleys of grief. That can be an invaluable tool. Keep in mind that not every counselor will fit your needs or your personality. It may take visits to a

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TCF's Facebook Page is a proven support area for bereaved family members to come and talk about their grief. Stop by and visit with some of our more than 120,000 Facebook members. **Please join our TCF/USA Facebook family.** Tell us about your child, sibling, grandchild, or other loved one and find support in the words and concern of others. **Check out the Discussion Boards!** Every day we also provide thought provoking questions, grief quotes, and links to grief stories, as well as TCF news such as updates on the National Conference, Worldwide Candle Lighting, and other TCF programs.

Closed Facebook Groups: The Compassionate Friends offers several closed Facebook groups to connect with other bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. The groups supply support, encouragement, and friendship. Recently added groups include Men in Grief; Loss to Long Term Illness; Loss of a Step Child; Loss of a Child with Special Needs.

The Compassionate Friends National Newsletter

A complimentary issue of the National Newsletter is sent to bereaved families who contact the office at The Compassionate Friends, Inc., 48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808, Wixom, MI 48393, (877)969-0010.

email:

NationalOffice@compassionatefriends.org

Website: www.compassionatefriends.org

Visit the **sibling resource** page at www.compassionatefriends.org. It is also available to read online without charge.



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About The Compassionate Friends

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. Founded in England in 1969, the first U.S. chapter was organized in 1972. Since then, 635 chapters have been established. The current Quad City Chapter was formed in 1987 (<http://www.quadcitytcf.org>).

TCF National Office

48660 Pontiac Trail, #930808

Wixom, MI 48393

Toll Free (877)969-0010

TCF National Web site:

www.compassionatefriends.org

Mission Statement

The mission of The Compassionate Friends Quad City Area Chapter is that 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.

Vision Statement

The vision statement of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us, and everyone who finds us will be helped.

To the Grieving Dads on Father's Day

Since my daughter's passing, the rest of the world seems to focus on my well-being while somewhat forgetting about my husband's. To this day, I don't understand it. When did we start lacking such great empathy for the bereaved father? My newsfeed is flooded with heartfelt posts in the days before and the day of Bereaved Mother's Day, but it's seldom I see much about the grieving father on any given day, let alone, Father's Day.

But he lost a child too.

Understand this, I had never seen my husband cry until we lost our daughter. *Never*. And to witness such a strong man vulnerably grieve, plea, and sob aloud over the death of his then-youngest child, something he could never tangibly fix himself, is a chilling image that will forever be etched inside the innermost parts of me.

For the first time, we were faced with something that was infinite in the most traumatizing, profound way. We will never meet another person who understands so intimately what it was like to lose our daughter. His hurt is my hurt, and mine is his, in a way I've yet to find outside of child loss.

Although mothers and fathers may grieve the death of their child differently, their hearts are crumpled up, stomped on and mangled all the same, and we need to normalize this. *Today*. Right here, right now, on

Father's Day. My heart is damaged for me, but it throbs in pain far more for my husband and every other bereaved father grieving in silence due to the stigmatization toxic masculinity has brought on. What a sad day it is when society creates an image of how one ought to be, and its hold oppresses a man in mourning.

We talk about the grieving mother, but how can we forget the father?

Why are we dismissing the one who brought his grief to work with him in those early days, because this world stops for no tragedy? When did we forget long nights spent making funeral arrangements for his child alongside his mother too? Though he smiles, inside

he grieves deeply and sincerely.

Time will

have moved on, but he will have stayed. He appears whole, but just beneath the shallow surface of that exterior, whole pages of his life's story have been ripped out before they had a chance to be written.

On the morning my own daughter died, I rode with the EMTs to the hospital with my daughter in the ambulance. As the paramedics started running out our front door, they said one parent could ride along, and I didn't give my husband a glimpse of

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The Bittersweet Balm of Father's Day as a Bereaved Dad and How You Can Help

This weekend will be Father's Day. As a bereaved parent, I both dread the day and quietly long for the recognition it brings. I am a father, after all, to one child still here and one who is not, and to receive acknowledgment for that is a balm. It is, of course, a torment of sorts.

For those who have lost children, these holidays can be particularly trying times — their social media feeds will be flooded with picture-perfect representations of families and their children. Many turn their phones off on these days, unable to expose themselves to the drip-feed of other people's happiness. As Mother's Day is for mothers of children who are gone, these holidays often find us succumbing to our darker feelings — simmering anger, envy, self-pity, depression.

Four years ago, my daughter Greta was killed by a falling brick on the Upper West Side. The accident was freakish, a perfect storm of negligence and timing. She had been such a powerful little person, a force to be reckoned with even at 10 months old. Whether it was putting on socks, walking upstairs, or brushing her teeth — which consisted only of wetting a toothbrush and sucking off the water, over and over, until I gently pried it from the iron grip of her toddler fingers — Greta radiated unconquerable certainty. She was sure of herself, of who "Greta" was, and this world seemed to exist for her benevolent conquest. I still cannot

imagine that energy, so happily invincible, being snuffed out so quickly and unceremoniously. It is the part of the loss that still leaves me gasping, years later.

Ever since that freak accident, I have become acutely aware of what it means to feel expelled from the society of parents, one I felt I had worked so hard to join. In the weeks and months after Greta's death, I felt an awful need to walk up to parents — complete strangers — and inform them that I, too, had once been a parent. I resisted, but the words burned in me as if I had shouted them. Children's laughter, once the happiest sound in the world, became oddly mocking, even cruel, in my ears. I would walk past a young girl, maybe seven or eight, attempting a barefoot cartwheel in the grass and watch her flop over, laughing, and feel nothing but bitterness. Everywhere I went I saw parents with daughters slightly older than Greta — they were either reminders of what I missed or visions of what I missed out on.



Anyone who has lost a child has a complicated relationship to the notion of "luck," but I am deeply aware that in many respects my wife and I are impossibly fortunate. We have a son, Harrison, born 15 months after his sister died. Therefore, Father's Day is very

different for me than it is for other bereaved parents, for whom the choice to have another child is often not even an option. But even for us, it is a balancing act — despite visible evidence, I remain a father of two.

There is an absence in my life that is ever-present, and she is named Greta. On days when other families post selfies of their clamoring children and their quarreling siblings, her absence becomes more vivid to me than ever before.

So what to do, and, most importantly, what to say? I have been asked this question by too many well-meaning and kind souls to count. What do you say to a friend or loved one suffering from grief over a lost child, particularly on days such as Father's Day? I am no grief expert, so I will quote one: "Above all, grief must be witnessed." These are the words of David Kessler, an author and public speaker on grief who runs workshops across the country. I was lucky enough to meet David early on in our grief journey, and in following his lead and in meeting many other bereaved parents I have learned some truths.

First of all: No matter the intensity of the pain a grieving parent may feel, the pain of invisibility is worse. When grieving a child, you learn early to live within the vast cognitive dissonance that is your life. You become an expert at distinguishing between kinds of pain. There is good pain, and there is bad pain, and the only good kind of pain comes from acknowledging your child's existence. Do not be afraid to speak the

name of a deceased child for fear of causing the parent pain. Their name was given to them in love, it was spoken in love, and to speak it is to strike that joyful note again. There is nothing that parents love to talk about more than their children. That never changes, even when the child is no longer here. The worst and loneliest thing a grieving parent can feel is the suspicion the world has forgotten their child. Speak the child's name; you may bring tears to that parent's eyes, but they will be at least partly of gratitude.

Individual parents grieve in individual ways, of course. Just as with love, each of us has our unique way of expressing ourselves. But while the names we give the feelings inside vary from person to person, the feelings themselves do not, at least not much. Every grieving parent you know is probably a little sadder than usual on Mother's Day, or Father's Day. Or Christmas, Hanukkah, or Halloween. Their wounds feel a little rawer, their grief a little more palpable. Do not be afraid of them, or their grief. Do not worry that you are going to hurt them further by acknowledging them; they are already in pain. Tell them that you see them. Tell them that you love their children.

Perhaps you do not need to wish them a "happy" Father's Day. But perhaps, if you feel moved to do so, you could wish them a peaceful one.

**Jayson Greene is author of the memoir
"Once More We Saw Stars"**

Support Groups for Grieving Parents & Siblings

The Compassionate Friends, Quad City Chapter Meeting Upcoming meeting on

Thursday, June 23, 2022 at 6:30 p.m.

**Our meeting is held in-person at 1830 6th Avenue, Moline, Illinois,
on the second floor. Masks and social distancing are required.**

**The summer meetings of the chapter are on
July 28, and August 25, 2022.**

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| The Compassionate Friends of Muscatine | Meets the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 at the George M. Wittch-Lewis Funeral Home, 2907 Mulberry, Muscatine, Iowa. Chapter Leaders are Linda and Bill McCracken. You can call them at 563.260.3626 for directions or information, or contact them at linmac67@machlink.com. |
| Rick's House of Hope | Rick's House of Hope serves children, ages 3-18, and family members from the Quad Cities and nearby counties. We serve those with grief, loss, or trauma issues. Death of a loved one and divorce are common; however, any sort of traumatic event or family change would fit our criteria, such as: bullying, teen dating victimization/harassment, crime victims, and other needs. The continuous groups are Family Together for all members of the family on Wednesday nights 5:00-7:00 pm and a Teen Night on Thursdays 5:00-7:30 pm. All meetings are held at 5022 Northwest Boulevard, Davenport, Iowa 52806 and are free. Rick's House of Hope also does individual counseling/therapy. For more information, contact Lynne Miller, Program Manager, at millerl@verafrenchmhc.org or go to www.rhoh.org. |
| SHARE | A support group for parents who have lost a child through miscarriage, stillbirth, or early infant death. SHARE meets the third Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. via ZOOM MEETING during the pandemic and in "normal time" in the Adler Room #1 in the lower level of Genesis Heart Institute, 1236 East Rusholme Street, Davenport, Iowa. Questions? Contact Chalyn Fornero-Green at 309.373.2568, or chalyn@shareqc.com or www.shareqc.com. |
| Phone Support | If you need someone who understands and will listen, feel free to call or email (if address is given): <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> ♥ Doug Scott 563.370.1041, dns0826@gmail.com ♥ Kay Miller 309.738.4915 ♥ Rosemary Shoemaker 309.945.6738, shoeartb4@gmail.com ♥ Judy Delvecchio 563.349.8895, delvecchiojudy@hotmail.com </div> Doug, Kay, Rosemary, and Judy are willing to take calls from bereaved parents, grandparents, or siblings who want to talk to someone who cares that they don't feel alone. |

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an opportunity before I started running toward the ambulance. My mom was already at our house to stay with our older children while we went to the hospital, and she still remembers my husband caving to the floor and sobbing the deepest, saddest sobs before coming to the hospital.



It was the cry you make when you know your child is dead, but you'd

been holding back your emotions because your wife still had some small hope. He knew I needed it, even if it were just a few minutes' worth.

I don't know what it's like to be a grieving father on Father's Day, but I find those tangled into this unlucky club to be the strongest and most admirable men out there. And if this is you, I don't know why the world falls so short at acknowledging your hurt.

It will never be okay that something so unfixable and permanently tragic had to happen to your family. It's not alright that you have to grieve on a day you are meant to celebrate and

feel appreciated. These aspects and this version of your life will never be okay. But it *is* okay that you, *yourself*, were and are unable to fix what has already happened.

It's all right if life is not as it once was, and some days are filled with more sorrow than the others. For that is grief. You haven't failed because your child died, and your family needs more than just outright strength to navigate the toughest days yet.

You've shown your strength for so long already, and you are seen. Even in the fog-filled days of acute grief, you put your own needs aside for the well-being of your entire family. It wasn't asked of you, maybe you didn't even want that responsibility, but you grabbed it by the reins because you are *Dad*.

Your child died, and it's not okay. But you are more than the father who lost his child. Though a piece of your heart is and will always be missing, you are still you, your family is still a family, and you are still Daddy.

It's Father's Day, and I hope you, the Bereaved Father, know I'm thinking of you again.

**Caila Smith –
Scarymommy.com**

Contact the Editors

- ♥ If you read or write an article or poem which might be helpful to other bereaved parents and would like to share it...
- ♥ If you move and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please send us your new address. Because we send the newsletter bulk rate, the post office will not forward it...
- ♥ If you know someone you think would benefit from receiving the newsletter, send his/her/their name and address...
- ♥ If you prefer to no longer receive the newsletter or if you prefer to receive this newsletter via email...

...Please contact Jerry and Carol Webb 390 Arbor Ridge, Benton Harbor, MI 49022 or email CarolynPWebb@gmail.com.

Remembering on Father's Day

Telling stories and hearing stories reminds us of the ways our love and our legacies continue. Children remembering fathers, fathers remembering children, finding the strength and moment to tell someone who never met our loved ones just how great they were, and to share memories with the people who can remember with us.

If you're a person who likes to write more than talk (or someone who likes to do both), here are some questions to get you thinking and remembering (and maybe sharing, if that's your thing).

- ♥ Places I go (or will) because of you.
- ♥ Things I learned from you.
- ♥ Things you used to say or do.
- ♥ People I wish had the chance to meet you.
- ♥ Ways I am a better person because of you.
- ♥ My favorite memories of you.

Litsa Williams—whatsyourgrief.com

I don't grieve just for the moment my loved one passed.

I grieve the past, the future, and the now. A human being is more than just one moment in time.

Angie Cartwright

Such a Beautiful Day ... Why Am I Crying?

This is a question that comes up every spring, particularly from the more newly bereaved. Spring is something we have looked forward to before tragedy hit. The cold, drab, bleak winter is finally over. Somehow, we thought spring would be the magic to free us from our pain. Unfortunately, not so!

Perhaps it is because we see this beautiful unfolding, and our child is not here to share it. The devastating knowledge that the "magic" of spring did not change our feelings. That the world seems to go on, just as if nothing had happened, when our world seems to have stopped, seems impossible to comprehend. False expectations. What we tend to forget is, though the seasons change, where we are in our grief cycle is what controls our feelings.

Just hold on to the fact that spring is a rebirth of what seems dead, as dead as you feel, now. It is true, you will never stop missing your son or daughter; however, hold on to the hope and belief your spring will come again, too. When it does, it will be different. Just as the trees and flowers aren't the same, you won't be either. But their beauty is still there, and as you start to come back to life again, you will find different joys in life. We each run on a different calendar, so no time frame can be put on your spring. Just know your feelings are perfectly normal. It may seem you are back at square one, but look back, remember what it really was like at the beginning, and I think you will realize there has been progress, and there will be more.

Mary Ehman – TCF/ Valley Forge, PA



The Compassionate Friends

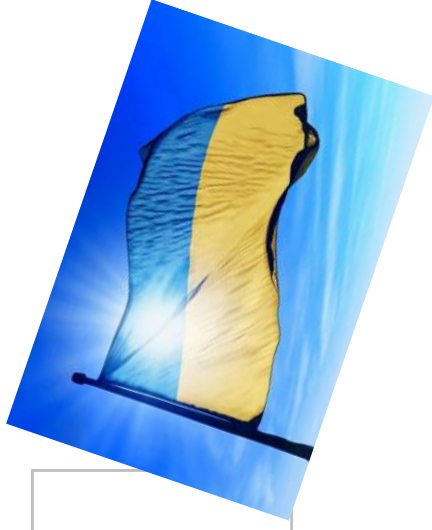
Quad City Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



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To those who are receiving our newsletter for the first time, we wish you were not eligible to belong to this group, but we want you to know that your family and you have many friends. We who have received love and compassion from others in our time of deep sorrow now wish to offer the same support and understanding to you. Please know we understand, we care, and we want to help.