



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**



KAMLOOPS CHAPTER

SPRING 2015



"The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again."

- Simon Stephens Founder TCF

CHAPTER LEADER

Carol Dreger,
Box 29 Knutsford, BC, V0E 2A0
Phone (250) 374-6030
Email waskamloops@shaw.ca

NEWSLETTER

Arleen Simmonds Phone (250)374-2135
Email waskamloops@shaw.ca

MEETINGS

1st Wednesday Every Month @ 7:00 PM
Kamloops United Church,
421 St. Paul St. Kamloops

NEXT MEETINGS

April 1, 2015
May 6, 2015
June 3, 2015

TCF CANADA NATIONAL OFFICE

Email NationalOffice@TCFCanada.net
www.TCFCanada.net
Toll Free: 1-866-823-0141

Welcome

Especially to those newly bereaved who have joined us for the first time. The Compassionate Friends is a voluntary self help Organization offering support, understanding and hope for the future. All bereaved parents are welcome.

We are sorry we had to meet under such circumstances, but we are glad you found us. We would like to do all we can to help you through these times. We cannot hurry you through it or take away the pain, but we can help you understand more about what you are going through. Sometimes just knowing what you are feeling is normal can be helpful.

We are other parents who have experienced the death of a child and offer understanding and support through our monthly meetings a lending library, support material and a listening ear. We have learned the key to survival for bereaved families is communication.

We ask that you give us more than one meeting to decide if The Compassionate Friends is for you. It takes courage to attend your first meeting, but those who do come find an atmosphere of understanding from other parents and siblings who are having or have experienced the feelings of grief that you are now feeling.

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,
That heavy Saturn laughed and leaped with him,
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew.
Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.
Yet seemed it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did play

~ William Shakespeare



Kent Simmonds Photo

FYI

**TCF Annual Retreat at Seabeck , WA May 29- May 31, 2015
at the beautiful Seabeck Conference Center on Hood Canal .
"Sharing Our Paths to Hope and Healing"**

**Our Keynote Speaker : Dr. Bob Baugher , Ph.D.
"Individual Differences in Grieving: Why Are We So Different?"**

**Retreat Cost : \$220.00 per person (shared room)
(2 nights lodging & 6 meals - Friday supper through Sunday lunch)**

Registration Due By: April 28, 2015 Space is limited .

See Registration Form and Information page for more information.

**For more info about the retreat, call 206-241-1139 or email: tcfmarge@aol.com
For more information about Seabeck Conference Center , visit www.Seabeck.org .**

You Can Also Call Carol At TCF Kamloops 250-374-6030

BC Bereavement Helpline Service(s): Helpline, referrals, information.

Contact: (604) 738-9950 Email: bcbh@telus.net

Website: www.bcbereavementhelpline.com

Suicide Support SurvivorAdvocates@yahoogroups.com

Sibling Websites www.tcfatlanta.org/sibling.html

Grief Works BC Service(s): Provides comprehensive support for the bereaved.

Contact: Kay Johnson at (604) 875-2741 Email: kjohnsoncw.bc.ca

Alive Alone Support for parents who have no surviving children. <http://www.alivealone.org>

Grief Watch: www.griefwatch.com

Canadian Parents Of Murdered Children <http://www.cpomc.ca/>

Center For Loss In Multiple Birth (CLIMB) Inc. www.climb-support.org

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support www.nationalshare.org

This newsletter is also available in an electronic version. With the increase in postal rates we are asking if you would give consideration to receiving the newsletter via email. We will always make newsletters available by post for those without computers. Please email us at waskamloops@shaw.ca if you are able to change to the electronic version. The electronic version has the advantage of being in colour and will often have bonus articles. Thank you to those who have made the change.

CONTRIBUTIONS: THE UNITED WAY Contributions to The Compassionate Friends/Kamloops may be made through the United Way. This can be done directly or through payroll deduction. The Compassionate Friends Kamloops Chapter must be specified as the designated recipient. The United Way will issue receipts to individuals for these donations. We are given a total only, no names of donors, and so we thank everyone who donates in this way. Other means of donations can be made directly to The Compassionate Friends of Kamloops or through other employee charity campaigns. We thank all those who support us with their donations, helping to carry out the important outreach done in the memory of our children. *We Are A Registered Charitable Non Profit Organization.# 0792895-09 Receipts Will Be Issued For Income Tax copyright 2015*

EDITOR'S MUSINGS. . . .

Arleen Simmonds/Editor TCF Kamloops Newsletter

DEATH BY ICE CREAM *Arleen Simmonds TCF Kamloops, B.C.*

Recently I was part of a discussion with some other Compassionate Friends about the very early days of grieving our children. We agreed that one of our fears was that we might indeed actually get to live and spend many years in a life without our children. Instead of counting how many sleeps until an awaited wonderful happening, we were counting down the years we had left to suffer and mourn.

Sometimes we engage in unconscious behaviours that might give us a passive way out of our situation without doing anything overt that we could be blamed for. I think I chose death by ice cream. Night after night I sat in a chair, all evening, eating large soup bowls of vanilla ice cream, knowing full well that some health issues were not well served by this behaviour.

It all came to a head one night when my husband paused in front of me, probably consuming a second or third helping, and asked me if I didn't want to see my grandchildren grow up. That was a light bulb moment for me. I realized that I still had something to live for, something to do and contribute to my family. I knew I couldn't dishonour Kenneth by making him the reason to abdicate my life. It was a step.

Another area I was copping out on was taking care of my personal appearance. My family were used to me 'putting on my best face', something I learned from my mother! I didn't realize my departure from normal routine was anything anyone noticed, including myself. One day my daughter told me her little sons were worried that Grandma wasn't the same anymore, didn't even look the same. Another light bulb moment. I realized that the reason I hadn't been looking after my appearance was because I literally could not bear to look at myself in the mirror. That tear ravaged face with eyes so full of pain was a sight I could not bear to look at. Every time I saw myself I was reminded of the terrible loss of our son. Of course, once again, the pain and confusion of my grandchildren helped to move me outside of myself. The instinct to mother doesn't die with our children.

Ice cream didn't finish me and Maybelline didn't save me, but the same love that I have for Kenneth and all my children and grandchildren has a way of pulling me toward life and living fully. I can do that for him and all of us.

WORDS *Arleen Simmonds, TCF Kamloops, B.C.*

Working through the grieving process for the bereaved can take a lot of years; people are in a fragile state and very sensitive to every word that is spoken to them. Believe me when I say, the wrong words however sincerely meant, leave wounds that last a long time. Such phrases as "it was God's will", or "it must have been his time", or "well, it's been 6 months, you must be over it by now", or "it's time you moved ahead", and on and on. When people don't know what to say they sometimes say the most extraordinary things.

The people I talk to say they would just like a hug, no words are necessary. Or just be honest and say, "I have no words but I care so much."

I have heard people ruminating over these ill spoken words for ages past the happening. In my case as I'm sure it is in others, after years have passed you can have forgiveness and understanding as you realize you may have done the same yourself in the past, but at the time it is devastating.

I still remember to this day, 26 years after losing our beloved son, how a woman came up to me and said, "I heard about your son, well it's been about a month hasn't it? You must be getting over it by now." The words are engraved in my brain. Forgiven now but forgotten never.

So let us not speak ill advised words with good intentions. If you are with the person a hug goes a long way, if a hug seems inappropriate, grasping a hand will do. The only words you really need are "I'm sorry" don't try to be profound. If you want to write but don't have words there are wonderful cards out there that say what we would if we could. You need only to add, "I'm sorry, you are in my prayers, I'm here for you."



Lamps For The Journey...

Duty makes us do things well. But love makes us do them beautifully. ~ *Phillips Brooks*

Iron rusts from disuse; stagnant water loses its purity; even so does inaction sap the vigor of the mind. ~ *Leonardo Da Vinci*

No one can take away my freedom to choose how I will react, ~ *Viktor Frankl*

I am going to try to pay attention to the spring. I am going to look around at all the flowers, and look up at the hectic trees. I am going to close my eyes and listen. ~ *Anne Lamott*

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing we can do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. ~ *Reinhold Niebuhr*

We delight in the beauty of the butterfly but rarely, admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty. ~ *Maya Angelou*

I can't go back to yesterday because I was a different person then. ~ *Lewis Carroll*

For happiness one needs security, but joy can spring like a flower even from the cliffs of despair. ~*Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The spring will come.~*Robert H. Schuller*

Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step. ~*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: "What! You too? I thought I was the only one." -*C.S. Lewis*

For every beauty there is an eye somewhere to see it. For every truth there is an ear somewhere to hear it. For every love there is a heart somewhere to receive it. – *Ivan Panin*

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible. ~*Saint Francis of Assisi*

Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling in at night. I miss you like hell. ~*Edna St. Vincent Millay*

We look before and after, And pine for what is not; Our sincerest laughter With some pain is fraught; Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. ~*Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Can anything be sadder than work left unfinished? Yes, work never begun. ~ *Christina Rossetti*

The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions - the little, soon forgotten charities of a kiss or a smile, a kind look or heartfelt compliment. ~*Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

EASTER

Dear Friends;

In previous years, as a single adult, I didn't care much for Easter or give it great attention. I regarded it as an overly solemn occasion, and one with less than ample compensation for the lengthy gloom (LENT) that pre-ceded it.

When I became a parent, Easter took on a new meaning. Perhaps through the eyes of children I began to glimpse the human side of this tradition, which now seems to me as much a celebration of Spring, as a Resurrection of the Spirit. Easter now means new clothes for the children, Easter eggs, spring flowers, family dinners, and an Affirmation of Life renewed, with whatever religious and /or secular traditions you observe. It calls for us to step forward from the dark and gloom of winter, into the warm and sun filled Spring. It calls for us to reflect on the beginning of life, to take renewed pride in our families, to join and to be surrounded by our friends and loved ones. This, of course, is the idealized version of life. It is often not that simple for families who have illness, poverty, separation, or the death of a loved one to deal with.

This was the first year I visited the cemetery on Easter Sunday. I felt the need. As on previous occasions, I crouched and moved among the little grave stones, reading names in silence, feeling saddened by the tender years inscribed. I felt sorry for the little children buried there. I felt my tears mingle with those of the parents who had stood here before me, earlier in the day. My sympathy turned to those parents (and grandparents, to be sure).

Moments later, as I looked around this cemetery, in a larger view, a different view emerged. Amidst the bounty of flowers and palm, amidst the crosses and wreaths, amidst even little Easter baskets, I saw only tender love, dedication, and commitment to the memory of loved ones buried there. Such commitments can only be carried out by parents who know it is important to survive.

These other parents, too, have lost children. Young children, teenage children, and adult children. That does not stop them from coming. That does not stop them from loving. That does not stop them from living. May the Hope of Spring, and the warmth of its sun, brighten your days.

Bob McCullough TCF Burlington County, NJ



EASTER THOUGHTS

One more winter overcome,
One more darkness
Turned to light and promise.
Winter is the price for spring.
Struggle is the price for life.
Even in sorrow, remember
To prepare your heart
For celebration

-

Next spring perhaps,
Or the spring after that....
Wintersun ~Sascha Wagner

Perspectives On Mother's Day

My April Child

When our daughters were growing up the arrival of springtime was a favorite time of the year, filled with anticipation of the coming of special days of family fun. The freshness of the air, the brilliant colors of springtime trees and flowers, and the song of the birds returned from their winter retreat resounded the message of hope and that life was good. We had survived another cold, snowy Michigan winter and we were soon to be rewarded with blue sky, sunshine and temperatures well above freezing!

Birthdays in our family were a time of celebration together. Each year Larry, Anna, Debbie and I, and perhaps a friend or two, would celebrate Anna's April birthday by dining at her favorite Mexican restaurant. There would be lots of silliness and laughter. During her teenage years, Anna would always forewarn us not to have the staff come to our table to sing their crazy birthday song. Of course, since we always insisted that our role as parents was to embarrass our children, her threats and warnings could not stop our tomfoolery. I believe she secretly enjoyed the attention.

As Mother's Day approached, we looked forward again to spending the day together as a family. We would attend church, go out for my favorite brunch, have lots of conversation, fill our bellies to the max, laugh until we cried, be silly, make memories... That was before...

Then the unthinkable happened. My April child died. How could those special days of love and togetherness, laughter and fun become among the most dreaded days a mother must face? How could those days that we had once anticipated with joy and excitement bring such unbelievable heartache and confusion, loneliness and tears?

During those first few years we were simply lost. This was new, undesired, and certainly not requested, territory that we had been forced to enter. What were we supposed to do? How were we supposed to act? I just wanted to run away on her birthday. For several years we did just that. With hearts filled with the numbness of fresh grief, our restructured family of three would hop in the car and head out of town. We would spend the day busying ourselves with whatever it took to survive. We would laugh half-heartedly, share memories, or cry together as we struggled to discover our new identity as a family without Anna's physical presence.

As always, only a few short weeks following Anna's birthday Mother's Day would arrive right on schedule. The traditions we had come to love and enjoy became intensely painful. It became an impossible task to attend church services or go out for brunch. Seeing families enjoying their togetherness pierced my heart with an endless ache. My tear-filled eyes burned at the thought of being surrounded by "intact" families. Feelings of anger and resentment overwhelmed my heart.

On the inside I wanted to lash out at all those mothers and fathers who were surrounded by all of their children and those sisters and brothers who had no clue what it would be like to lose a sibling. As the day drew to a close I felt tremendous relief that it was over. Exhausted, I would lay silently with my head on my pillow as quiet tears lulled me to sleep.

It seems impossible that it has been nine birthdays and nine Mother's Days since Anna died. In my heart it was only yesterday. I can still see her smile and hear her laugh. I can feel the warmth of a quick hug as she heads out the door. With each passing year comes a new reality of what it means to be a bereaved parent, of what it means to find a new normal for our lives. The pain continues to occasionally catch me off guard, but it is softer now. The tears still come, but less frequently. Warm memories bring joyful moments to the emptiness. I smile quietly to myself, reassured that Anna lives on in our hearts and lives, as well as in the hearts and lives of those around us. Once again each April we celebrate the day of her birth, for her life has been a gift of unimaginable joy. Our traditional Mother's Day rituals have changed to new ones. There is more laughter now, fewer painful tears. I rejoice that I can celebrate that I am Debbie's mom, and now Scott's mother-in-law, as well! Life is good.

The winter has been long and cold, as has been the winter of our grief. Springtime has arrived. The sunshine and blue sky, the purple crocus and yellow daffodils pushing through the warming earth bring hope of renewal and reassurance that life continues. Although there is an irreparable hole in my soul and an emptiness in my heart that will never leave, I am forever grateful that Anna lived with us for 23 years. I am eternally thankful that I am and I always will be Anna's mom. May the warmth and brilliance of springtime fill your hearts with times of peace and hope and love.

*Paula Funk
TCF Petsokay, MI*

TCF Unconditional Caring

by Kitty Reeve TCF, Marin & San Francisco, CA

My Son Philip died in August 1994, when he was 26 years-old. He died by suicide, influenced by a genetic illness, bipolar mood disorder (manic depression). I well remember how I flinched inwardly when people began referring to Philip's having "committed suicide." It seemed to diminish my wonderful son, to make him into what he never was: a kind of criminal. I wanted people to remember the beauty of his soul, yet what they focused on was the shocking way in which he died.

So it has been personally important to me to learn that TCF has made a change in the language it uses related to suicide. TCF now uses the terms "died of suicide" or "died by suicide" in all publications and presentations. The new, emotionally neutral language helps to lift the burden of stigma from all of us whose children or siblings died by suicide. It gives us strength and helps us heal.

If your child or sibling has died in one of society's less "acceptable" ways-by suicide, murder, alcoholism, from a drug overdose, AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases or in prison do know that TCF does not accept society's stigmas. There is no room for blame or condemnation when all our hearts are aching for the children we no longer have. We honor your child and your grief, no matter the cause of death.

Similarly, if you are a parent or sibling who may feel "other" in our oft-judgmental society, please know that you will not be "other" in TCF. We welcome you with understanding and compassion, whatever your age, your race, your ethnicity, whether you are rich or poor, married or single, gay or straight, whatever your religion or lack of religion. We welcome you.

And if you have endured the most terrible tragedy, if you have had more than one child or sibling die or have lost all your children or siblings, you are welcome. Many people are terrified that we are "contagious" because the worst nightmare has become a reality in our lives. They don't want to believe what we know: that neither we, nor they, can keep our children safe and alive. So they avoid us. And they especially may avoid you who have had more than one child or sibling or all your children die, because the horror of what has happened in your lives terrifies them. We welcome you, and we honor your courage and want to be helpful to you in your healing. We offer our compassion and understanding to all parents and siblings and other family members who are on this very difficult journey into healing. May the unconditional acceptance one finds in TCF someday be mirrored in a wiser and more tolerant society.

~reprinted from Marin County, CA TCF Newsletter



The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we have to heal each other, the enormous power in the simplest of human relationships: the strength of a touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of someone else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness. Everyone alive has suffered. It is the wisdom gained from our wounds and from our own experiences of suffering that makes us able to heal. Becoming expert has turned out to be less important than remembering and trusting the wholeness in myself and everyone else. Expertise cures, but wounded people can best be healed by other wounded people. Only other wounded people can understand what is needed, for the healing of suffering is compassion, not expertise. -Rachel Naomi Remen

A Grandmother's Grief by Carol Kearns

My mother, diagnosed with lymphoma, died just before Mother's Day in 2008. Only two months prior, she had been a high spirited fun-loving woman, the heart of our family who was looking forward to her 90th birthday celebration that fall. As I cared for my dear mother, knowing I would soon lose her, I reflected back on my daughter Kristen's death at age seven and my mother's concerns about me at that time.

I had been so consumed by my own grief then, and the grief of my young son, only nine when his sister died, that I was hardly aware of others' grief. Not until a few years ago did my mother confide her pain of not only grieving for her precious granddaughter, but her daughter as well. Her fear was that the tragic and sudden loss of Kristen could also mean the loss of her daughter. "Kristen drowned in the ocean," she said, "but you were drowning in grief. I know you felt helpless to save her, but I felt the same about you. I had no idea how to rescue you." Surprised to hear this, even though I had also feared losing my mind, I became aware for the first time of the unique role grandparents play when their grandchild dies.

I recently became a grandmother myself and have been overjoyed with this new role of welcoming Joseph into the world. My favorite picture is of my mother, shortly before she died, with a huge smile and outstretched arms reaching for baby Joseph when meeting him for the first time. While my mother's death, unlike Kristen's, is part of the natural cycle of life, I will miss her deeply. She taught me so much. I think of her often in my new role as a grandparent.

When Joseph was born, I had the luxury of spending the first several weeks with him, watching him change daily as his parents moved nervously into their new role. I loved being witness to the bond developing as they changed from being a couple to being a little family.

My son, a resident in anesthesiology, studies nightly, often with Joseph nestled against his chest in a baby sling. He once shared how much he misses his baby while he spends long hours at the hospital. Watching the creation of this strong parental bond, I became aware of the unique dual bond of the grandparent. A bond that takes her heart to places she never thought possible...a bond that should never be broken. I now appreciate more than ever what my mother experienced.

Taken from Carol's Columns http://www.carolkearns.com/columns/col_gma.html



MAY

*May is kind,
None of March's bluster,
Or April's fickle pranks,
May is gentle sun,
And scented blossom,
Set apart for spirit's ease.
May cancels winter,
And the storms of spring,
She gives birth to warmer days.
May is Mother's month,
Expression of her best,
Expectant, warm and nurturing.
May is a state of mind,
Perhaps a place of Grace,
On the landscapes of the heart.*

Arleen Simmonds TCF/Kamloops, B.C.

Five Years Ago

Five years ago I was changed forever.
Five years ago I felt you growing and moving inside me.
Five years ago my heart was broken.
Five years ago I heard your heart beating.
Five years ago I held you so shortly.
Five years ago you were on this earth for just two precious hours.
Five years ago was the last time I laid eyes upon you.
Five years ago the silence was so deafening.
Five years ago I kissed your cold forehead.
Five years ago I sobbed so hard I never wanted to stop.
Five years ago I left for home without you.
Five years ago my arms were empty and aching to hold you.
Five years ago I lost my sweet angel.
Five years ago I was living a nightmare.
Five years ago I loved you so much.
Five years later my life is still changed forever.
Five years later I long to feel you moving and playing beside me.
Five years later my heart is still incredibly broken.
Five years later I still remember hearing your heart beating.
Five years later I long to hold you for so much longer.
Five years later I wish you were here for more than two hours.
Five years later how I long to see you.
Five years later the silence is still quite haunting.
Five years later I wish I could kiss you all over.
Five years later I still sob just as hard.
Five years later I wish you were home with us.
Five years later my arms are still empty without you.
Five years later you are still my sweet angel.
Five years later that nightmare is still so vivid.
Five years later you are still loved so very much.

Written by Kathleen Berg

In memory of Valerie Hope Berg

Born five years ago on February 26th, 2010

Taken from Share Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support <http://nationalshare.org>

LAUGHING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

I hadn't given much thought recently to the idea of laughter in this bereavement journey, but just the other day I was surprised by laughter from the inside out.

Looking out of my kitchen window into the back lane, I saw a young dog on a leisurely morning ramble. He was all alone, looking so dapper in his shiny black coat, white socks and chest, ears at the alert and a tail that no doubt could clear a coffee table in one swipe!

He was the image of a long ago dog who was the pride and joy of our two youngest sons, Kent and Kenneth. The boys named their dog TC which was short for Thunder Cloud, which because of his black coat they thought he resembled. TC was a joint birthday present for the boys eighth and ninth birthdays. I still remember that joyful reaction, "oh mom, this is the best birthday gift we ever had!" TC gave so much joy and laughter to the whole family with all his antics and loving ways. Even though TC's life was not a long one, he left us with such memories and unforgettable stories.

The young dog in the lane mesmerized me for quite some time. The neighbourhood was so quiet, the sun was shining and the air was still. He and I were alone in the world, I the silent watcher and he the happy wanderer. Birds and butterflies caught his attention, he would leap and twirl in his pursuit of them, a butterfly here, oh, a bird over there, chase one then the other! He didn't seem to care that he didn't catch any of his airborne prey. He leaped and bounded in the most unfocused and carefree way.

As I stood there in rapt attention, I could feel something growing, it bubbled up from somewhere deep inside, unbridled delight, a laugh from the heart that grew until it came rippling out and plastered itself in smiles all over my face. I could even feel it beaming out of my eyes. It was one of those rare moments when somehow you are at one with the universe and every sense is turned to joy.

When we were struggling with our grief for our son and brother Kenneth, smiling and laughing seemed to be something we did for appearances sake. An obligatory curling of the lips, a polite little ha, ha, to keep the world outside and mask our feelings. Our eyes were dull and the chill was still there inside. I don't know how long it took to genuinely experience involuntary smiles or laughter, especially without the guilt, it's different for all of us; when we do at last have the experience it is a moment to savour. This must be what C.S. Lewis meant when he wrote about being surprised by joy.

I could imagine Kenneth joining me in spirit that day, grinning at the antics of the TC look-alike and sharing in the joy of the moment and all the good memories, he had a way of laughing from the inside out.

*Arleen Simmonds, TCF/ Kamloops, B.C.
In Loving Memory Of Kenneth 30/10/64-11/8/88*



Teen and Young Adult Grief *from Grief Watch <http://www.griefwatch.com>*

COPING WITH TEEN GRIEF

Every year thousands of teenagers experience the death of someone they love. Statistics put the number around one in ten adolescents between the ages of ten and eighteen having experienced the loss of a close loved one. Many of these losses are sudden, such as a friend or sibling dying in a car crash, or a parent dying of a heart attack. Due to the fact that teens are in the process of forming their identity, a death of a loved one is likely to have an impact on the rest of their life. The sense that the loved one who is lost was someone who was helping the teen to form their identity will have a lingering affect on the identity they form.

WHY IT'S SO HARD TO GRIEVE AS A TEEN

The teen years are complicated enough under normal circumstances. From hormones and body changes, to peer pressure, social expectations and academic demands, being a teenager is hard. In many cases, all the stress leads to fighting and strained relationships. When you add a death into the mix, the sense of being completely overwhelmed is multiplied. Teens can feel guilt because they were fighting with the loved one prior to the death, or can feel alone because they have been fighting with the adult that they would usually turn to for emotional support.

NO LONGER A CHILD, BUT NOT YET AN ADULT

It is easy to view a teen as the child that they were not all that long ago. Many parents and close family members and friends may be tempted to treat them that way. A teen will cope with grief better if they are acknowledged as someone old enough to grieve deeply. On the other hand, although a teen may look like an adult, it does not mean that they are ready to grieve as an adult. They still need extra support and guidance on a consistent basis to make it through this complicated process. Putting expectations on a teen that they should be strong for those around them, or that they should be the one to care for the family following a death, will likely make the teen feel that they do not have permission to grieve like those around them.

IMPORTANCE OF AN ADULT'S GUIDANCE

Though teens are often trying to assert their independence, a time of grief is one in which it can be helpful to rely on an adult for guidance. Teens will watch how adults react to a loss in order to gauge how they should respond. If adults are open and honest with teens about their feelings, then the teen is more likely to be willing to share their feelings as well. Trying to spare teens grief by choosing not to discuss the loss in front of them will not stop them from grieving, it will only reinforce a tendency to keep feelings bottled up inside. With the help of a trusted adult, such as a parent, family friend, therapist, or school counsellor, a teen can learn important lessons about the joy and pain that come from truly caring about another person.

GAINING THE TRUST OF A TEEN OR YOUNG ADULT

The easiest way to gain a teen's trust is to take the time to listen. Let them know that you care about what they have to say and acknowledge the depth of their grief. Don't tell them how to grieve, instead listen to how they are approaching their grief process, and share with them what has helped you during your times of grief. Let them know that it is natural to feel sad, or frustrated, or angry. Also, let them know that they shouldn't feel guilty if they sometimes feel happy too.

OFFERING RESOURCES

For most teens, books and research are a way of life. The majority of their time is spent in class or working on homework. While providing access to websites or books about grief can be a way to show a teen that you know they have the skills to work on their grief on their own, it is important to reiterate that you are there to talk to, and that you hope they will share their feelings with you as well.

continued.....

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Activities are a great way to help teens process their grief. There are a variety of different activities that prompt a teen to take the time to think through what they are feeling and why. Once a teen starts processing, they are more likely to share their feelings with you. If a teen would rather just talk, they will usually let you know. Some possible activities you could try are:

- Start a journal, diary or blog
- Write a story, poem, song or eulogy
- Create a memory book about the loved one who died
- Create a collage using words and pictures from an old magazine
- Visit a hospital or nursing home

SUPPORT GROUPS AND PEER COUNSELORS

For most teens, their trusted group of advisors is their friends. They often believe that adults are unable to understand what they are going through, and that only peers of the same age group can comprehend how they feel and what they are going through. This mentality makes peer counsellors and support groups the ideal settings for many teens and young adults to process their grief. For many teens are the sources of comfort, acceptance and support that they need.

SIGNS THAT IT MAY BE TIME TO SEEK OUTSIDE HELP

Making the distinction between the normal mood swings and experimentation that most teens go through at some point and the signs that a teen is struggling to cope can be difficult. Here are some signs that might indicate that a teen could use some outside help to process their grief.

- Isolation from friends and family
- Changes in behavior or appearance
- Changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Lack of motivation, skipping school, or dropping grades
- Sudden change in who the teen associates with
- Overwhelming social, family or academic pressure
- Depression or unusual levels of anxiety
- Talk of suicide or a fixation on death
- Constant feelings of anger or guilt
- Reckless sexual behavior
- Drug use

“Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It’s a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.” - *Pema Chodron*