



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

KAMLOOPS CHAPTER

Autumn 2018

"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

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NEWSLETTER

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MEETINGS.

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

NEXT MEETINGS

September 5, 2018
October 3, 2018
November 7, 2018
December 5, 2018

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.

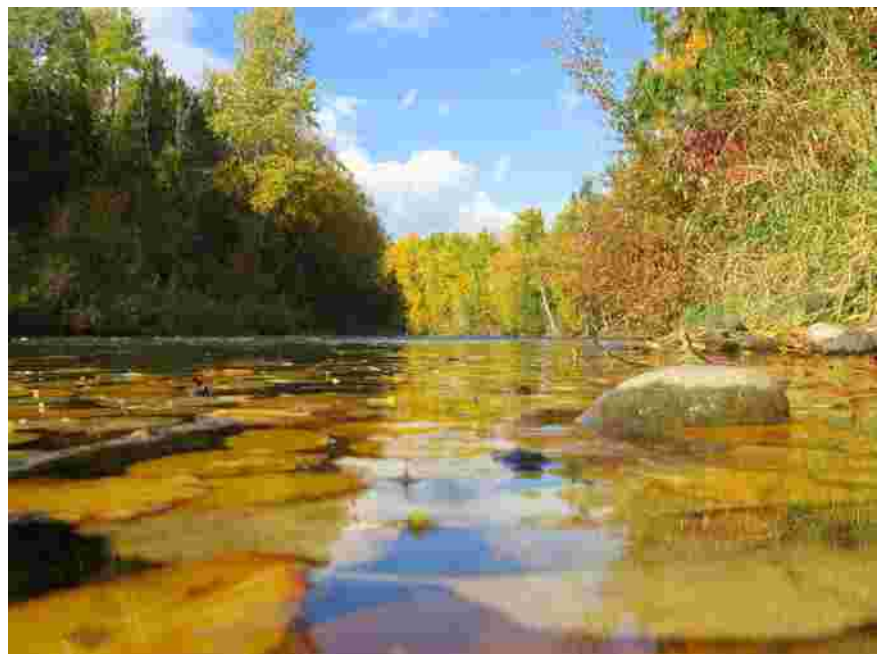
We are sorry we had to meet under such circumstances, but we are glad you found us. We would like to do all we can to help you through these times. We cannot hurry you through it or take away the pain, but we can help you understand more about what you are going through. Sometimes just knowing what you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

*"Dancing of
the autumn leaves
on a surface of
a lake is a dream
we see when we
are awake."*

~ Mehmet Murat Ildan



FYI

TCF Kamloops Facebook Page: [The Compassionate Friends Of Kamloops](#)

BC Bereavement Helpline Service(s): Helpline, referrals, information. Contact: (604) 738-9950 Email bcbh@telus.net 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: kjohnsonew.bc.ca

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

Grief Watch: www.griefwatch.com

Pregnancy & Infant Loss Support www.nationalshare.org

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

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

Change Of Information: If you have a change in your contact information—postal mailing address, email address, telephone, name, etc. or wish to be removed from our contact list please let us know by emailing Arleen at waskamloops@shaw.ca or 250-374-2135 or Carol at 250-374-6030.

This newsletter is also available in an electronic version. If you are able to change to the electronic version please email us at waskamloops@shaw.ca

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Lamps For The Journey ...

"Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the Earth seeking the successive autumns." ~ *George Eliot*

The fact that I can plant a seed and it becomes a flower, share a bit of knowledge and it becomes another's, smile at someone and receive a smile in return, are to me continual spiritual exercises. ~ *Leo Buscaglia*

Keep all special thoughts and memories for lifetimes to come. Share these keepsakes with others to inspire hope and build from the past, which can bridge to the future. ~ *Mattie Stepanek*

Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value. ~ *Desmond Tutu*

I have always believed, and I still believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value. ~ *Hermann Hesse*

There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly ~ *R. Buckminster Fuller*

Re-member us, you who are living, restore us renew us. Speak for our silence. Continue our work. Bless the breath of life. Sing the hidden patterns. Weave the web of peace. ~ *Judith Anderson*

We can reject everything else: religion, ideology, all received wisdom. But we cannot escape the necessity of love and compassion. ~ *The Dalai Lama*

Who so ever survives the test must tell his story. That is his duty. ~ *Elie Wiesel*

"There is something incredibly nostalgic and significant about the annual cascade of autumn leaves."
~ *Joel L. Wheeler*

A shadow flits before me-not thou, but like to thee. O God! that it were possible for one short hour to see the souls we loved, that they might tell us what and where they be. ~ *Alfred Lord Tennyson*

The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love, and be greater than our suffering. ~ *Ben Okri*

The most important thing in life is to learn how to give out love, and to let it come in. ~ *Morrie Schwartz*

"Lost love is still love. It takes a different form, that's all. You can't see their smile or bring them food or tousle their hair or move them around a dance floor. But when those senses weaken another heightens. Memory. Memory becomes your partner. You nurture it. You hold it. You dance with it." ~ *Mitch Albom*

I didn't plan to be this person, for whom loss always hovers at the edge of my awareness like next month's bills, but there you have it. I've carried the remote ache of longing with me long enough to understand it's part of who I am now ... This is part of my identity that I can never change... Our lives are shaped as much by those who leave us as they are by those who stay. Loss is our legacy. Insight is our gift. Memory is our guide. ~ *Hope Edelman*

WHEN A BABY DIES

by Martha Jo Church, Helene Chazin and Karen McBeath (The Compassionate Friends, Illinois, USA)

“At least you didn’t bring it home.” “Luckily you never really knew the baby.” “You’re young, you can have another.” Do these statements sound familiar? Obstetrics is supposed to be the ‘happy’ place. When tragedy strikes there, it is perhaps doubly expected. The true tragedy is that most people are unaware of the feelings women have when they deliver a premature, defective or stillborn child. Parents of premature infants and of those with congenital defects experience grief, even if their children live, because those parents have lost their anticipated perfect child. If stillbirth or neonatal death occurs, comments like those quoted above mean well, but are far from helpful.

Those who have lost newborns or who have experienced stillbirth have found it common for many people not to recognize the loss as being quite as tragic as those of an older child. The death of an infant is often considered ‘an unfortunate occurrence’, but one that can easily be rectified by the birth of another child. Such a replacement is rarely assumed when an older child dies. Often none but immediate family members see the child. Because of that, to most people the baby did not exist as a ‘real’ person and they cannot begin to be aware of the love, the hope, the self-confidence and the future that was lost with that child.

Because of some special circumstances shared only by parents of infants who have died before or shortly after the birth, we write this article to briefly describe some of the unique needs to which The Compassionate Friend responds.

Unlike parents who have lost older children, PARENTS OF NEWBORNS HAVE NO MEMORIES. If they are lucky, there is a picture, a lock of hair a footprint. Some were never able to hold or even see their babies. Often there are only dreams and the memories of a few moments, hours or days.

Giving birth to a defective child often brings QUESTIONS OF SELF WORTH. “What did I do?”, “Will I ever have a healthy baby?”. There is a compound grief over the birth as well as the death of the child.

PHYSICAL RECOVERY PUTS AN ADDED STRAIN ON BEREAVEMENT. Mothers commonly are not a part of funeral arrangements, if indeed there is a funeral, due to the need for them to stay in the hospital. This loss of involvement can become a block to final separation and to a healthy grieving process. There are the physical reminders of having given birth but empty arms. Erratic hormonal shifts during physical recovery cause ‘post partum blues’ under normal conditions. When the baby dies, the mother’s weakened physical state and normal hormonal mood swings make the initial grief that much more intense.

PARENTS WHOSE INFANT HAS DIED ARE OFTEN NOT CONSIDERED TO BE, OR TO HAVE BEEN, PARENTS. That kind of attitude held by others, causes parents to feel that there is something wrong with them because of the deep grief they feel, and makes them feel that they should be able to forget this ‘unfortunate thing’ and go back to their normal lives quickly. Meanwhile, phantom crying, a common occurrence, haunts them as a sign of mental imbalance. If the baby was the first, mother will often feel in limbo, suddenly having no role or purpose in life. She may have resigned her position to prepare for a new stage in her life motherhood. Now not a mother, nor employed in her prior position, what is she? Self image shaken where is her meaning?

THE DEATH OF AN INFANT WILL HAVE AN EFFECT ON SEXUAL INTIMACY. If a couple decides to become pregnant again, they might find themselves dealing with the grief over their baby’s death as well as the fear generated by the new pregnancy and its potential consequences. Sexual disharmony is common due to fears of future failures, guilt for having pleasure and memories of how their dead child was created.

The father of the baby is often passed over, even by those people who are sympathetic to the loss. “How is your wife doing?” they ask, while FATHER’S OWN FEELINGS ARE OVERLOOKED MORE SO THAN IF THE CHILD WERE OLDER. After all, they reason, only mother carried and bore that child. They cannot understand that the baby, the hopes, aspirations and expectations are as much his as his wife’s. But he must go out and face the world in his role of worker, withholding his grief as society expects him to, so that he can function ‘appropriately’ in his role. He may be forced to repress his feelings.

If there are older children in the family, these siblings find it hard to grieve if they never saw the baby. They may not fully comprehend what has happened or what is making Mommy and Daddy act the way they do. FOR A CHILD IT IS HARD TO SEPARATE FROM A BROTHER OR SISTER YOU HAVE NEVER SEEN . . . hard to separate fact from fantasy.

continued

Depending on the age of the sibling, there may be fantasies about their baby; how he or she looked, where the baby went, etc. Jealousy toward the expected child may turn to guilt, believing that their wishes caused the baby to die.

Although there are some special problems faced by couples who have lost newborns, it is important to be aware of the common feelings that all grieving parents share. We share the sense of helplessness, the severe alterations of day to day living, the seemingly never ending grief. We all go through the same stages: the shock, the denial, the anger and depression, and, hopefully the eventual reconciliation. These special messages are stressed:

Remember that your baby was indeed a person an important part of your life.

Someone else remembers with you through The Compassionate Friends.

You have just as much right to grieve as anyone, no matter how brief your baby's life.

This is a time to be selfish don't let other people make the decisions for you.

With all of our differences and our special needs, there are basically more similarities than differences between parents who lost newborns and those who have lost older children. Who can compare one against the other, anyway! Just as all our children's deaths were different, so too are all our grieving experiences. The most important common bond we share is our need for each other to encourage and help us in the rebuilding of our lives.

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THE GIFT OF SOMEONE WHO LISTENS

Those of us who have traveled a while
Along this path called grief
Need to stop and remember that mile,
That first mile of no relief.
It wasn't the person with answers
Who told us of ways to deal.
It wasn't the one who
talked and talked
That helped us start to heal.
Think of the friends who quietly sat
And held our hands in theirs.
The ones who let us talk and talk
And hugged away our tears.
We need to always remember
That more than the words we speak,
It's the gift of
someone who listens
That most of us desperately seek.

Nancy Myerholtz
TCF Waterville/Toledo, OH

We Get By With A Little Help from Our Friends

I realize that the title of this essay, modified from an old Beatle's tune, definitely dates me, but it really says it all. When I was much younger, a few years after this song was popular in the late 60's, and feathering my nest, I used to religiously read, "Hints from Heloise." She was the lady who would give you all kinds of helpful advice on how to maintain your household; like the best way to get a spot out of the carpeting, or get crayon off the wall or gum out of your child's hair, etc. I believed that she had the answers that would establish me as "Susie Homemaker". Of course, that was back in the days when it was of paramount importance that my house was the cleanest one on the block, where I lived in mortal fear that someone would drop over and find it less than perfect and whatever would they think of me???

Now it sounds so shallow and insignificant to the point of embarrassment. But that was before my daughter Nina died, and the tidy little world I lived in came crashing down around me and ceased to exist.

Once I started to thaw out from the shock and disbelief, it sunk in that I was truly and sadly a bereaved parent, that there was no going back, and no magic words that would whisk me away from this horrific nightmare I was now living, I wondered where were the helpful hints on how to survive being a bereaved parent. Where was the Heloise of Bereavement who was going to have some answers for me? I wanted step by step guidelines on how to help myself and reassurances that I wasn't losing my mind. I needed someone or something to give me permission to grieve for my daughter in whatever way felt right for me.

I would like to share an abridged version of a handful of hints that I and other TCF members I have met on this journey over the years have used to get through the day the best we can:

1) If you can possibly do so, get an answering machine or voicemail. Just because the phone rings doesn't mean you have to answer it. There are so many times when you just don't have the energy to even talk on the phone. Most often people are calling to tell you they care and are thinking about you, which you need to hear, so let them leave you a message, and when you feel able then you can give them a call back if you want.

2) Have a supply of Kleenex always handy, in every room in the house, in the car, and, for the ladies, in their purses (also a helpful aside for the ladies, two words to remember, an absolute necessity: Waterproof Mascara!). I was lucky enough to have a bereaved parent friend who knew that I had a knack for forgetting to put Kleenex in my purse so she would carry an extra purse size packet for me too. You just never know when a grief storm will hit and its good to be prepared. And if you can find them, preferably get ones with Aloe in them.

3) If you want to go to the cemetery multiple times a day, or you like to take a lawn chair and a book and sit at your child's grave site for quiet reflection, go right ahead. Some people will discourage you from this and tell you that it is unnatural and unhealthy to do this. I was five minutes away from the cemetery and in my early grief if the need hit me I could and would go out there whenever I wanted, and that may have been one time or five times in a day, even at midnight. Gradually, without consciously realizing it, my need to be at the cemetery daily became less and less as time went on. I stopped thinking of Nina as being there and more about my belief that wherever I was she was there also.

4) Do whatever you need to do (short of harming yourself or anyone else, of course!) to get through the especially tough times; whether it is the major holidays just around the corner, the first day of school, the change of seasons, or seeing your child's friend graduate/get married/become a parent, or any of the other milestones in life that you weren't privileged to see them accomplish. The best helpful hint here is to do what feels right for you. That can mean that you decide 5 minutes beforehand whether you want to go to an event/celebration or not, and then change your mind again if you need to. And if you find yourself at that event/celebration, feel free to sit close to an exit door or have an escape route so that if you feel you just can't stay then you can leave quickly and quietly. You don't need to explain or make excuses; you have every right in the world to feel how you feel, and do what is best for you. You are truly the only person who knows what that is.

5) Turn to the invaluable voices of experience. For me, I was lucky to have a caring funeral director point me in the direction of The Compassionate Friends, and attending the meetings where I listened to others with a similar loss became a lifeline for me. Here is where I learned about the "new normal" and found people who could relate to my grief experiences. These same wonderful people told me that I could talk about Nina all I wanted no matter others reactions. They told me that I never had to "let go" of her memory and that they too bristled at the word "closure" just as I did. Realizing that support groups aren't for everyone, staying in touch through the newsletter and other grief resources gives you another valuable connection. Like the above "helpful hints for the bereaved," I have learned so many things from those I have met from TCF since the unthinkable tragedy of May 11, 1995. Nothing "little" about it, I am eternally grateful for the "help from my friends." *Cathy Seehuetter TCF/St. Paul, MN*

Autumn

There is a wind where the rose was,
Cold rain where sweet grass was,
And clouds like sheep
Stream o'er the steep
Grey skies where the lark was.

Nought warm where your hand was,
Nought gold where your hair was,
But phantom, forlorn,
Beneath the thorn,
Your ghost where your face was.

Cold wind where your voice was,
Tears, tears where my heart was,
And ever with me,
Child, ever with me,
Silence where hope was.

by Walter de la Mare



My Cover-Up Mask

I wake in the morning with tears in my eyes. I have to face another day without my child. I prepare to go to work and put on my "cover-up mask" as I go out to face the world.

I get my work done and even chat and sometimes smile at my co-workers. And they say, "My, how well she seems to be handling her loss." If they only knew what I am suffering under my "cover-up mask." My work day is over, and I go home and remove my "cover-up mask," and the tears come again.

I go to bed, as the darkness of night envelopes me and sleep eludes me, the tears come again. I have gotten through another day without my child. I have learned I must take one day at a time for the rest of my life, since it will never be the same again. ~Joan Watson TCF, Salisbury, MD

Halloween

It is here, this day of merriment and children's pleasure.

Gremlins and goblins
and ghosties at the door
of your house.

And the other children
come to the door of your mind.

Faces out of the past,
small ghosts with sweet, painted faces.

They do not shout.

Those children

who no longer march laughing
on cold Halloween night,

they stand at the door of your mind –

and you will let them in,

so that you can give them

the small gifts of Halloween –

a smile and a tear.

~WINTERSUN by Sascha

School Day's

The summer is mellowing as the days grow shorter
The green on the trees seem to droop, and look a little duller.
The lazy days of summer take on a busy hustle
As families shop for school,
each gets a new book satchel.
Soon the quiet streets will be filled
as children gather waiting
The yellow bus to pick them up. OH! the anticipating.
Another teachers face the greet upon their arrival
But the same old lessons to be learned,
to them seems so trivial.
New friends to make, and old ones too
Make their days fly past to soon.
But back at home a mother weeps
for the child that this year misses
No new clothes to buy,
no more good-bye hugs and kisses.
For her this joyful time just brings on more heartache
Another school year starts,
another milestone the child cannot make.
So she dries her eyes
and tries to go on for the children that remain
But each new start, breaks her heart,
it's hard to see the gain.
So if the yellow school bus brings
on tears for you this year
Don't forget your Compassionate Friends,
we are always standing near.

*Sheila Simmons, TCF Atlanta
~reprinted from TCF Atlanta Online Sharing*



First Thanksgiving

The thought of being thankful
fills my heart with dread.
They'll all be feigning gladness,
not a word about her said.

These heavy shrouds of blackness
enveloping my soul,
pervasive, throat-catching,
writhe in me, and coil.

I must, I must acknowledge,
just express her name,
so all sitting at the table,
know I'm thankful that she came.

Though she's gone from us forever
and we mourn to see her face,
not one minute of her living,
would her death ever replace.

So I stop the cheerful gathering,
though my voice quivers, quakes,
make a toast to all her living.
That small tribute's all it takes.

by Genesse Bourdeau Gentry



Remembrance Day 2018

And Still They Die

I was searching for a poem or article for Remembrance Day that I could share in this newsletter. I looked through all my usual sources, all the poems from the first and second world wars, essays and articles. I leaned back into my own memories of a father who was killed at sea when I was only four.

I just couldn't find anything that seemed relevant to what we know of war in our present day. We still send our young men and now women to distant lands to "keep the peace" and protect and serve. There is one difference when our service men and women lose their lives in distant lands, for the most part they are returned to us, flown home in flag draped coffins and driven in solemn cortege on highways of heroes to be buried in graves of honour in their homeland.

Long years ago our war dead were buried in simple graves in foreign lands. Some were unidentified, their families never to know their final resting place. They were all so far away and so many thousands of them. Some families were able to make the long pilgrimage to pay their respects many years later. For some survivors their descendants had to do it in their honour.

The sheer numbers of the fallen in past wars overwhelmed the mind and imagination of the magnitude of it all. Today when we see those solitary hearses travelling the hero's highways lined with all those paying tribute we are able to focus on the individual losses to those families left to mourn. What can't be grasped in huge numbers can be felt in a sense of personal sadness and despair at the madness of it all as we bear witness that indeed the loss of even one brave soul diminishes all of us.

Arleen Simmonds TCF Kamloops



Helping Yourself Heal When Someone You Care About Dies of a Drug Overdose

Center for Loss | Jan 12, 2017 | Articles by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

A friend or family member has died of a drug overdose. Death and grief are always hard, but when someone dies from drug use, understanding your feelings and knowing what to think and say about the death can be especially difficult. This article offers compassionate guidance for coping with your own grief as well as helping others affected by the loss.

Addiction and the opioid epidemic: People of all backgrounds and socioeconomic levels are affected by addiction. Addiction is a recognized disease in which the pleasure centers of the brain get taken over by the need for the drug. Addicts cannot control their behavior.

In the United States today, the majority of drug overdose deaths involve an opioid, such as prescription painkillers or heroin. About two and a half million people are addicted to these drugs, and nearly 100 people die each day from an overdose. In fact, opioid use and overdose trends have grown so bad that the Department of Health & Human Services has labeled the problem an epidemic.

You are not alone. Millions of families and friends have lost a loved one to drug use. This doesn't make the death of the unique person you cared about any less tragic. It does mean that there are resources to help you and many people who may be able to understand and support you.

Coping with the stigma: Even though addiction is a disease that can affect anyone, there is still a social stigma associated with drug overdose deaths. For you, a person who has lost someone special, this can seem doubly unfair. Not only has someone you cared about died, but others may avoid you or make you feel ashamed about the death.

Remind yourself that your friend or family member died of a common, deadly disease. Learn more about opioid use and how it's affecting so many. Reach out to others impacted by overdose death. Talk openly about what happened. Shining a light of openness and empathy on overdose deaths will help you and others heal.

A complicated grief: Grief is what you think and feel on the inside after someone you care about dies. Your grief will naturally be complicated by the cause of this death.

If the person who died was young and otherwise healthy, that fact will affect your grief. We typically feel a sense of injustice and a stolen future whenever a young person dies.

We also often feel anger when deaths are caused by behaviours. You might be mad at the person who overdosed, at others whom you perceive enabled the behaviour (such as a drug dealer), or at medical staff or police who may have been involved.

You might also feel guilty that you weren't able to help the person stop using drugs before it was too late—even though the behavior was outside your control.

Whatever your complicated thoughts and feelings may be, your task now is to express them in healthy ways.

Mourning the death: While grief is what you feel on the inside, mourning is what you do when you express your grief on the outside. Crying is mourning. Attending the funeral is mourning. Talking to others about the death is mourning. Part of your mourning will be about the cause of the death. Over time, the larger part of your mourning will be about the loss of a special, unique person who was loved by you and others.

Openly and actively discussing all your thoughts and feelings about this death will help you cope with the stigma and eventually heal. Mourning helps you acknowledge the reality of the death, embrace the pain of the loss, remember the person who died, consider the meaning of the person's death, and receive support from others.

Do not let the stigma of the death keep you from mourning fully. Talking about drug overdose and your particular loss will help our society grow more compassionate and work toward solutions.

Learn about resources: Your community may have resources for people grieving an overdose death. Call your local hospital, health department, or funeral home to find out more about support groups, counselors, and volunteer opportunities. Nothing is better than face-to-face, personal contact with others who walked the same walk.

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There are also many resources online. Google “grief support overdose” and you’ll find a number of websites and forums dedicated to helping mourners like you. Reading others’ stories and sharing your own is often a great source of comfort, validation, expression, and healing.

Take good care of yourself : As you grieve this death, remember to practice good self-care. Think of yourself in emotional intensive care. Just as people who are severely physically injured need around-the-clock attention, you need and deserve excellent care for your psychic injury.

Rest often. Eat healthy foods. Drink ample water. De-stress your life as much as possible. Exercise gently but regularly. Spend time with people who care about you. Express your grief whenever you’re feeling it.

Meet your spiritual needs: Most of all, grief is a spiritual journey. You will naturally have questions about why this death had to happen now and in this way, and you might find yourself wondering about the purpose and meaning of life in general. If you believe in God, you may find solace in your faith, or you may be angry at a God who could let this happen.

All of these spiritual responses are normal. Making time each day to feed your spirit will help. Pray, meditate, visit a place of worship, go for a walk in the woods, journal about your spiritual struggle, or speak with a spiritual leader. All of these practices are forms of mourning, and all will help experience your natural grief and move toward healing.

Explaining this death to children: Any child old enough to love is old enough to grieve and mourn. Children affected by an overdose death deserve our compassion, our presence, and our honesty. Never lie to kids or keep difficult truths from them in an effort to protect them.

Start from the child’s place of understanding. Listen to and answer questions with words and ideas that are appropriate to the child’s age and unique development.

If the child was unaware of the person’s habit, you will probably first need to explain drug use and the disease of addiction.

Remember that young children, especially, are literal thinkers. If you tell them only that medicine killed the person, for example, they might end up being afraid to take their own medicine the next time they’re sick.

Young children are also prone to magical thinking. For instance, they sometimes think that something they thought or did may have caused the death. Reassure them that it wasn’t their fault.

Children, too, often sense the stigma of an overdose death. You can help by explaining that addiction is an illness and talking about thoughts and feelings openly and without judgment. Also, it’s never too early to start teaching children about the dangers of drug use.

Children typically grieve in small doses. They may upset one moment and playing the next. This is normal. Give them brief, frequent opportunities to ask questions or play out concerns (such as drawing or role playing). Be present and ready to talk and offer support. Express your own grief when it arises.

*“Those of us who have worked through our grief –
and found there is a future –
are the ones who must meet others in the valley of darkness
and bring them to the rim of light.”*

~Rev. Simon Stephens
Founder of TCF

THE AFTERMATH OF SUICIDE

I had never experienced the death of a close loved one before my brother died. When David died, my world came crashing down around me, shattering me into a million pieces. My brother and I were close, but I had no suspicion that he was contemplating suicide and had been for a long time. The night my sister called to tell me he was dead is etched into my memory forever. If I shut my eyes, I can go back to that time and place almost three years ago and still hear her voice. It is a very painful memory and one that I don't call up, but it is there, nonetheless.

The overwhelming feelings of shock, disbelief, numbness, despair and sadness are very vivid. At the same time, I was outraged at what he had done to us, to me. How dare he do this? I couldn't even begin to guess how many times I said, I can't believe this is happening.

The first six months was a confusing and emotionally draining period for me. I was obsessed with wanting to have answers, especially from him. I read many books on suicide and finally, after reading Iris Bolton's book, "My Son, My Son", I came to realize that what she said was true: You can ask why a million times, but you finally have to let it go, because the person you need the answers from is not here to give them to you. If only for the sake of your own sanity, you have to stop asking, "Why?" "I couldn't even begin to guess how many times I said, I can't believe this is happening."

Our family drew closer together from this tragedy, and it made me more aware of how much I value and love them. I also had the support of a good friend who was willing to spend hours talking and crying with me. I still get very angry at my brother for changing our lives so irrevocably. That anger inevitably turns to sadness. I cannot see his smiling face, or hear his laughter, or watch him grow into adulthood. Yes, I had dreams of him too. He was an intelligent, warm, sensitive and caring young man, and I was eager to see what direction his life would take. I can't help but wonder what he would be like today. I miss him very much.

I will never agree with his solution, but it was his choice to make and I have to learn to live with it. I am absolutely certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that I will be with him again. Only then will I get answers to my questions. I have no choice but to wait until that time.

By Nicki Wright, TCF, MO-DAN, KS

You're Here, Now You're Gone

You're here.

Now you're gone.

It went just that fast.

Where'd it begin? Where'd it end?

Like a flash of lightning in the sky.

So bright and full of life.

Now gone and full of emptiness.

How'd it start? Why didn't it stop?

No one knows, but everyone cares.

Your spirit is flowing in the air.

You're not here, but you'll never be gone.

You will always rise with the morning dawn

You hold my heart

It will never be torn apart.

by Catherine Ludlow, in memory of her sister, Cynthia, who died by suicide on June 24, 1993.

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