



# When a child dies, you need not walk alone.



**The Compassionate Friends** is an international peer support network for bereaved parents and their families. Its mission is to help bereaved parents cope effectively with their grief and help foster their physical and emotional health. TCF has no religious affiliation.

If your child has died or if you know of someone whose child has died, please feel free to contact The Compassionate Friends at [TCFOttawa@gmail.com](mailto:TCFOttawa@gmail.com)

For more information, please visit our website: [www.tcfottawa.net](http://www.tcfottawa.net)



---

The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is an international, non-profit, peer support organization, offering friendship, understanding, grief education and hope for the future to all families who have experienced the death of a child at any age, from any cause.

*“Grief becomes a tolerable and creative experience only when love enables it to be shared with someone who really understands.”*

*Rev. Simon Stephens, TCF Founder*

The Ottawa Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

## **Sharing Circles**

We now offer two opportunities every month for parents to meet — our usual In-person sharing circle, and a separate Zoom online meeting.

### **In-person Sharing Circle:**

**When:** The Ottawa Chapter meets on the third Tuesday of each month from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

**Where:** We meet at Tubman’s Funeral Home, 3440 Richmond Road, Nepean.

*Please Note: The entrance is located around the back, down the hill to the right.*

### **Zoom Online Sharing ‘Circle’:**

**When:** Available the first Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. ET. Watch for access instructions each month on our website.

For information on TCF, visit the TCF Ottawa website at [tcfottawa.net](http://tcfottawa.net).



---

## IN THE BEGINNING

Condensed article By Fay Harden, TCF/Tuscaloosa, AL

Your child has just died. As a newly bereaved parent you have experienced the most devastating life-changing event. Your whole world has been shattered and you are in a new world now. You will be relearning how to survive when at times you won't even want to survive. The only hope I can give you is that we in The Compassionate Friends have survived and we are here to help you. It won't be easy but keep in mind, if you hadn't loved so much you wouldn't hurt so much now.



There is no timetable on grief. Some work through the process sooner than others but for us who are bereaved because our child died, grief is longer and more devastating than grief from any other death in our lives. We operate on our own individual timetable.

Grief is process, a moving through. Sometimes we go forward, but sometimes backward, and sometimes we get "stuck" for a while, but eventually you will move through it. Within this process there are "stages". We're told those stages are shock, denial, anger, bargaining, and acceptance. They don't necessarily come in that order.

Most of us do experience shock and denial or disbelief at first. We can't believe it has happened; there must be a mistake! This happens to other people, not us! That shock is so tremendous that it affects us physically as well as psychologically. It is marked by a lowering of blood pressure, coldness of the skin, rapid heartbeat, and an acute sense of terror. That shock insulates us and allows us to go through our duties and do things at this time that we never could have done otherwise. We all react differently during grief, but there are common reactions we all share. This is why you will find that the only one who really understands what you are going through is another bereaved parent.

Anger, another stage, may come at any time. It is a very natural, normal reaction; don't be afraid or ashamed of it. Most of us feel some anger toward something, someone, even at God, even the child in some instances. You have been hurt beyond your wildest imaginings. It is good to recognize anger and try to focus it, learn to use it as a tool. It is important to do something physical about anger, we've heard many stories of chipping wood, buying dishes at garage sales and breaking them when we need an outlet. Scream in the shower, in your speed boat or closed up in your car, but get it out. Anger turned inward becomes depression.

Many of us suffer from the lack of ability to concentrate. It is a common complaint. We can't think, we can't remember from one minute till the next. At night you may go over the events again and again night after night. This is called obsessional review. Sleep disturbances are not unusual. We either can't sleep or sleep too much. Be patient; given time and some effort you will return to normal, or rather a new normal. Different than the past but somewhat tolerable.

You will have a strong need to talk. You will find that you can talk more than one person can listen, so seek out several good friends who will let you talk to them. You will find some at The Compassionate Friends meetings. You will need to tell your child's story over and over again. You will need to talk



---

about the whole life and the death and what you are going through now. Talking is therapeutic. Talk, and talk, and talk, until your story is told.

We suffer guilt, real and imagined. We remember things we did and things we didn't do. We go through the "if onlies". If only we had or hadn't....

Beware of isolation. We need to be with people, not alone. When we isolate ourselves with no one to talk to about our feelings, we become depressed; and isolation plus depression equals suicidal feelings, and that spells real trouble.

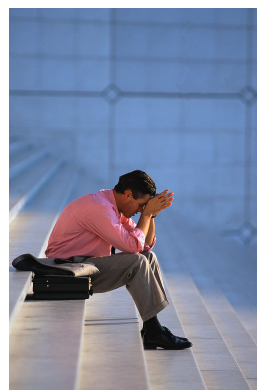
We are fatigued, lack motivation, we suffer numerous physical complaints, headaches, stomach disorders, we are either nervous or feel dead inside – many and sundry are our complaints, most of which are normal and to be expected in this time of enormous stress. And always we ask ourselves and others, "Why?", "Why me?", "Why my child?"... Simply because life isn't always fair.....

Your world is topsy-turvy now, family balance is upset, the numbers are all wrong, you don't dare think of holidays because you know you'll never survive them. Your child's birthday and the memory of all the joy of that day looms like a mountain far too high to climb – some days all you want is for the pain to stop. Some days you just can't get out of bed. Some days you work hard and fast like something has possessed you. Every day you cry. You find you are very lonely even in the midst of a crowded shopping mall. You want to scream at the busy, happy people, "Don't you know my child is dead? How can they go on as if nothing has happened?"

Remind yourself to be patient, to be kind to your self. You are not a failure, you did the very best you could, and you would surely have given your own life to save your child's. These feelings, and others as bizarre, may cause you to think you are going crazy. Ask any bereaved parent of some years and they will all tell you they thought the same thing at some time. You are living a changed now, you will never again be the same as you were before your child died. Look around you to the other bereaved parents; you will find role models and hope in them. There will be many tears, allow them, they are healing and necessary to survival and recovery.

The Compassionate Friends understand; each one of us has had at least one child die. We know what you are going through. We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we offer to share this time of your life with you. We want you to know you are not alone.

*"I wanted to die... to escape...the pain. It was the worst pain I had ever experienced. I kept thinking "Why, Why, Why?"*





---

## TO ONE IN SORROW

Let me come in where you are weeping, friend,  
and let me take your hand.

I, who have known a sorrow such as yours,  
can understand.

Let me come in – I would be very still,  
beside you in your grief.

I would not bid you cease your weeping, friend,  
tears bring relief.

Let me come in – I would only breathe a prayer,  
and hold your hand,

For I have known a sorrow such as yours,  
and I understand.

Grace Noll Crowell





---

## SNAPSHOTS

>>>The death of child is one of the most tragic events that can strike any family. No other loss compares with the loss of a child.

>>>When a child dies, it seems so unnatural and unacceptable that it is difficult to comprehend. This is particularly true when the death is sudden and unexpected.

>>>The death of a child represents the loss of future dreams, relationships, experiences and fantasies. When a parent dies, you lose your past; when a child dies, you lose your future.

>>>There is desire by parents to never forget. When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure.

>>> *“Suddenly she was gone and I was so fearful I would forget her... what she looked like.... This, I knew, I could never tolerate,”*

>>> *“I had to talk about him? I had to hang on to all the memories I had of him. I vowed never to surrender them. By being able to talk about him.... All the things he had ever done, I was able to keep him alive... at least, in my own mind,”*

>>>Many search for a cause or rational reason for the loss; a need to make the loss intelligible. It is the rare parent that accepts the loss of a child as an act of “fate”.

>>>A sense of vulnerability may come to dominate family life. Life may be viewed as something that can be snatched away any moment, without warning. A feeling that what is important in your life can no longer be taken for granted.

>>>The loss of a child tends to make bereaved parents more tolerant of other people and more sensitive to and understanding of the problems and suffering of others.

>>> *It’s amazing how my attitude has changed toward all the hardships that happen to people in the world.... I find myself reaching out in a more loving and understanding way than ever before,..*

>>> *“My son died 13 years ago....Although I don’t cry anymore as often as I used to, my life is not the same.... It will never be the same... nor do I expect it to be”.*

>>>There are many long months of agony, turmoil and confusion as bereaved parents desperately attempt to work through the acute phase of their grief.

>>>With the help and support of others, bereaved parents can achieve some resolution of their grief. There is a light at the end of the long dark tunnel. That light may go unnoticed at first, but given enough time and tears and support, it will eventually come into focus.



---

## **WE ARE THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**

**(The Official Credo)**

We need not walk alone. We are The Compassionate Friends. We reach out to each other with love, with understanding and with hope. Our children have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for our children unites us.  
Your pain becomes my pain just as your hope becomes my hope.

We come together from all walks of life, from many different circumstances. We are a unique family because we represent races and creeds.  
We are young, and we are old.  
Some of us are far along in our grief, but others, still feel a grief so fresh and so intensely painful that we feel helpless and see not hope.

Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength;  
Some of us are struggling to find answers.  
Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression;  
Others radiate an inner peace.

But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of  
The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share just  
as we share with each other our love for our children.

We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves,  
but we are committed to building that future together  
as we reach out to each other in love  
and share the pain as well as the joy,  
share the anger as well as the peace, share the faith  
as well as the doubts and help each other to grieve as well as to grow.

We need not walk alone.  
We are The Compassionate Friends



## Butterfly Release

The annual Butterfly Release takes place on the 3rd Saturday in June near the summer solstice. The event was started by TCF Ottawa in 2002 and in recent years has been adopted by CHEO as part of their outreach program.

We invite you to join us for this brief but very moving memorial to those children who have left us too soon.

This special event usually takes place in the gardens at Ronald MacDonald House, 407 Smyth Road (next to CHEO). Visit the TCF Ottawa website ([tcfottawa.net](http://tcfottawa.net)) for details: [Butterfly Release](#)





## Worldwide Candle Lighting (For the Love of our Children)

The Compassionate Friends holds a Worldwide Candle Lighting annually on the second Sunday in December. At 7 p.m. in every time zone, candles are lit in honour of all children who have died. As candles burn down in one time zone, they are lit in the next, creating a 24 hour wave of light that encircles the globe.... That their light may always shine.

**Remember to bring a photo of your child to place on the candle light table. Date and Location will be advertised on the TCF Ottawa website -- [tcfottawa.net](http://tcfottawa.net). For further information regarding this Candle Lighting please email [TCFOttawa@gmail.com](mailto:TCFOttawa@gmail.com).**

ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS





A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS – By Nina A Henry

Shortly after our fifteen-year-old son, Adam, died, I wanted to do something as a public remembrance of him. I needed to let the outside world know that we were grieving thoroughly for the loss of all that Adam was and all that he would have been. I especially didn't want others to forget my son. Our house is nestled in a clearing in the woods and accessible only by a very long driveway. Passersby cannot see our house from the road. And so, on a blustery November day barely a month after he died, I tied a large white bow for our Adam on a tree by the side of the road at the end of our driveway. It was a sign of love, of hope, of sorrow beyond all comprehension. Throughout the past year, as the bow became tattered and worn, I replaced it several times and have even managed to grow a few white flowers at the base of the tree beneath that white bow. Little else that I have done for my son since he died has held as much significance to me as this white bow, which has come to symbolize Adam's life, death and our grief.



Just prior to leaving for a family gathering at my mother's house on Christmas Day, I was feeling, as I regularly do, that I wanted to do something special for Adam. I made a luminaria with a gold angel on it; my husband, surviving son and I placed the luminaria under the white bow in the small flower garden. There, in the brilliance of a cold, clear Christmas afternoon, we lit a candle for our Adam. We added a second luminaria to burn in remembrance of all the children who have died. No one else could see the candles burning on that bright, sunlit day, but knowing they were there gave me a sense of peace. Last year, all afternoon while I was at my mother's house I thought of those luminarias burning by the side of the road for our Adam and all of the children who have died. I was uplifted and embraced by a sense of warmth I had not previously experienced.

It became apparent that those luminarias had also been of great importance to my husband and surviving son, for that evening, as we were preparing to leave my mother's house, we each wondered aloud if the candles would still be burning. Throughout the day, our thoughts of those luminarias had allowed each of us to endure the unendurable, and it now seemed crucial that the candles would still be lit when we returned home. My husband, surviving son and I needed to see that very small flicker of light glowing through the darkness.

The ride home from my mother's house on Christmas night had always been a time of supreme bliss for me; my two boys tucked safely into the backseat of the car, each of us filled with the joy and wonder of the day. I had savored this time and counted my blessings. Last year, our first Christmas without Adam, I wept. But this year, I was focused on those candles and all they represented. We drove home in silence, each of us lost in our own private memories of Adam; each of us wishing that somehow, some way the candles still burned.

As we anxiously approached our driveway, we strained to distinguish a glimmer of light in the darkness of that Christmas night. And YES, the candles remained burning and SO much brighter than we had expected! When we reached our driveway, our hearts soared as we saw that there, under the white bow in the very small flower garden by the side of the road a third candle now burned with our two.

The third candle had been placed by two very caring people who undoubtedly understood the very profound nature of their very compassionate deed. They are bereaved parents as well, who on a cold, dark Christmas night had come to our home to secretly fill our mailbox with small, meaningful gifts. All to be discovered on another day, at another time. What they left behind was a promise of light, perhaps just a small flicker at first, but light nonetheless, always burning through the darkness of our grief.



---

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS**

### **I. TCF offers friendship and understanding to bereaved parents.**

- We have learned that the death of our child has caused a pain that can best be understood fully by another bereaved parent.
- Knowing that all need love and support, we reach out as our own grief subsides to those who still feel alone and abandoned.

### **II. TCF believes that bereaved parents can help each other toward a positive resolution of their grief.**

- We understand that each parent must find his or her own way through grief. We know that expressing thoughts and feelings is part of the grieving process. We offer an opportunity for sharing and learning from other bereaved parents.
- We do not offer professional psychotherapy or counseling.
- We seek the cooperation and the support of the professional community but do not depend on it for supervision or formal guidance.

### **III. TCF reaches out to all bereaved parents, regardless of religion, race, economic class or ethnic group.**

- We espouse no specific religious or philosophical ideology.
- We support our activities through voluntary contributions and assess no due or fees.
- We do not participate in legislative or political controversy.
- We express our individual views on controversial subjects with respect and consideration for those who may disagree with us.

### **IV. TCF understands that every bereaved parent has individual needs and right.**

- We never suggest that there is a correct way to grieve or that there is a preferred solution to the emotional and spiritual dilemmas raised by the death of our children.
- Everyone deserves an opportunity to be heard, yet no one is compelled to speak and all have the responsibility to listen.

### **V. TCF helps bereaved parents primarily through local chapters.**

- We have established local chapters to provide sharing groups that create an atmosphere of openness and honesty.

### **VI. TCF Chapters belong to their members.**

- We treat what is said at meetings as confidential and what we learn about each other as privileged information.



---

**VI. TCF Chapters are coordinated nationally to extend help to each other and to individual bereaved parents everywhere.**

- We have learned that it is often easier and more effective to provide support services by working together at the national or regional level than to work alone.
- We seek opportunities to share with society the insights our grief has brought us so that future bereaved parents may receive needed understanding and support.
- We encourage other family members, especially siblings, to share in our task of mutual support.



The Compassionate Friends began in England in 1969, after two families whose sons died in the same hospital found they could support each other in a special way. These parents, with Reverend Simon Stephens, founded the society of the Compassionate Friends. In 1977, Joan and Bob Martin established the first Canadian Chapter in Winnipeg. Now there are several Chapters in Canada.



At every monthly meeting of the Ottawa Chapter of the Compassionate Friends, the books from our Library collection are displayed. Most of the books have been donated by parents in memory of their children. The books may be borrowed for as long as you need them and returned when you plan to attend one of our meetings. To see a complete list of our books with descriptions, visit the TCF Ottawa Chapter Webpage and click the link to the TCF Library. We are presently updating the list, replacing missing titles and adding new ones.

Early on in my own grief journey, a friend, and member of our group, dropped off a book written by a parent who had lost a child. I am a professional librarian and had always been an avid reader but at that time I could not concentrate on the novels I used to enjoy reading. I found that I couldn't stop reading that book and afterward looked for others like it to read. The books I found most helpful were written by other parents and just like our sharing circles, they reach us because the authors truly understand the journey we are all on. I hope you may find some of the books in our collection helpful on your own grief journey.

*Ingrid Draayer*  
Mother of Jesse Barrie  
1981-2009

#### **Suggestions of Comfort:**

- Treat yourself with kindness and patience
- Plan how to cope with special days
- Share your feelings
- Create a special remembrance of your child
- Seek comfort from your spiritual beliefs.
- Keep a journal
- Get specialized help
- Join a support group.



I would say to those who mourn.... Look upon each day that comes as a challenge, as a test of courage. The pain will come in waves, some days worse than others, for no apparent reason. Accept the pain. Do not suppress it. Never attempt to hide grief.



---

## The Compassionate Friends of Canada, Inc.

### Ottawa Chapter



*"The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of confusion or despair,  
who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement,  
who can tolerate not knowing... not healing... not curing... that is a friend indeed."*

*--Henri Nouwen*