



The Compassionate Friends *of Northwest Houston* Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Welcome to The Compassionate Friends. We are sorry for the reason you are here, but are glad that you found us. You Need Not Walk Alone, we are The Compassionate Friends.

AUGUST 2017

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

Cypress Creek Christian Church Community Center
6823 Cypresswood Drive, Room 20
Spring, Texas 77379

**We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.
(Our next meeting is Tuesday, August 8th)**

We are located between Stuebner-Airline and Kuykendahl, about 2 miles North of FM 1960 West. The Community Center is located behind the church, between the courthouse and Barbara Bush Library. At the York Minster traffic light turn into the church/community center parking lot. Follow the posted signs to our meeting room.

Chapter Leader:

David Hendricks
936-441-3840

dbhendricks@hotmail.com

South Texas Regional Coordinators:

Debbie Rambis (812-249-5452)

dsrambis@gmail.com

Mark Rambis (812-249-0086)

merambis@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor:

Linda Brewer 936-441-3840

llbrewer67@hotmail.com

National Headquarters, TCF

P.O. Box 3696

Oakbrook, IL 60522-3696

1-876-969-0010

www.compassionatefriends.org

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS MISSION STATEMENT

When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

To the Newly Bereaved

As the years pass, we see new members come into the chapter, and we try to help them with their grief as we progress in our own. Over and over again, I have seen newly bereaved parents come to their first meeting totally devastated and convinced that their lives are over. Through the months (and years) I have seen them struggle and suffer and try to find meaning in their lives again. And they do! Through all the anger, pain and tears, somehow the human spirit is able to survive and flower again in a new life – perhaps a changed life and possibly a sadder one, but a stronger one nevertheless.

We feel so weak and crushed when our beloved children die, but I know because I have seen it countless times in the years I've been involved with The Compassionate Friends that we can make it together. When you walked through the door for the first meeting, you were frightened and nervous; but with that step you made a statement about your life. With that first step through the door, you said you wanted to try, you wanted to find a reason for living again, that you weren't willing to be swallowed by your grief. You wanted to go forward, and those first steps into The Compassionate Friends began your journey.

The journey will be a long one, for you loved your child with all your heart and soul. When that child died, a part of you was ripped away. It takes a long time to repair that large hole. The journey will not always be steady or constant; there will be many setbacks. Those of us who have taken the journey before you can assure you that, while there may be no rainbow at the other end, there is indeed "light at the end of the tunnel."

We want to help you as we were helped, but in the beginning and in the long run, you must help yourself. You have to want to get better, to talk about your loss, to struggle through the grief. We will listen, suggest, share and laugh and cry with you; and we hope, at this time next year, you'll be several steps along in your personal journey through grief. Then you can begin to help others.





Lighting a candle, cherishing a birth.....

AUGUST BIRTHDAYS

2003-Makaylin Angel, Daughter of Jennifer Edwards
1999-Devin Wood, Son of Natalie Wood
1970-Lisa Renee Sanders, Daughter of Jim & Peggy Holland
1988-Shaun N. Finley, Son of Barbara Finley
2002-Samantha Short, Daughter of Linda Short
1988-Trace Thornton, Son of Nina Thornton
1988-Honey Khan, Son of Amra Khan
1963-Lloyd Ross (Rossi) Moore, Jr., Son of Carolyn Moore
1988-Matthew Peterson, Son of Sharon Peterson
1983-Fallon Ginther, Daughter of Lisa Ginther
1983-Travis Walden, Son of Janet Walden
1961-Terry Shannon Pauling, Son of Howard & Jean Pauling, Brother of Vicki Hyde
1995-Cheyenne Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker
1983-Christine Marie Frazier, Daughter of Steven R. Frazier
1980-Molly Long, Daughter of Carolyn Long
1955-Tony King, Brother of Carolyn Moore
1968-Dillon R. Howland, Jr., Son of Rachel Howland
2001-Emily Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker
1980-Ryan David Dodson, Son of Diane & David Dodson
1985-Derek Johns, Son of Shauna & Jeff Crook
1990-David Morgan, Son of Brent & Martina Morgan
1998-Katelyn Holmes, Daughter of Melinda Holmes
1989-Danielle Basford, Daughter of Jerry & Laurie Basford
1988-Samual Johnson, Son of Tim Johnson
1970-James Loveless, Son of Bob & Frances Loveless
1960-Kimberly Grubbs, Daughter of Patsy Grubbs
2013-Elias Reyes, Son of Crystal Reyes
2013-Jasmins Potter Jr, Son of Jasmins & Erika Potter
1984-Justin McHan, Son of Ronnie & Linda McHan
1978- Sarah Beltran, Daughter of Hila Beltran
1993-Forrest Gadler, Son of Tanya Gadler
1998-Tremaine Robinson, Son of Toya Robinson
1993-Cathrine Breeding, Daughter of Barbara Breeding
1997-Wesley Hundl, Son of Sharon Mondrik
1987-Marc Pournier, Son of Jolena Pournier
Ariel & Athena Suniga, Daughters of Selena Suniga



Lighting a candle, remembering a life

AUGUST ANGEL DATES

2008- Dillon & Alex Gussie, Sons of Debbie Benavides
2009- Nicholas (Nick) Skala, Son of Judy Skala
2007- Alan Jerome Austin, Son of Rhonda Austin
2003- Brian D. Klaus, Son of Johnny & Ginger Klaus
2011- Cherelle Luter, Daughter of Sylvia Green
2012-Landyn Elizabeth Tickle, Daughter of Matthew & Shelby Tickle
2013-James Loveless, Son of Bob & Frances Loveless
2013-Colton Alderson, Son of Jimmy Alderson
2013-Elias Reyes, Son of Crystal Reyes
2013-David Kerpchar, Son of Sally Kerpchar
2012-Misty Smith, Daughter of Terri DeMontrond
2008-Adam Brown, Son of Greg & Debbie Brown
2014-Gene Ware, Son of Roberta Ware
2014-Ginger Ware, Daughter of Roberta Ware
2014-Giavanna Calista, Daughter of Nicole Kelley
2015-Luke Curry, Son of Lynsy Curry
1983-Justin Ross Heino, Son of Darryl Heino
2015-Kellie Martin, Daughter of Denise Martin
2014-Hunter Smith, Son of Lee Smith



YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

You are not forgotten, loved one
Nor will you ever be,
As long as life and memory last
We will remember thee.
We miss you now.
As time goes by
We'll miss you more.
Your loving smile, your gentle face
No one can fill your vacant place.

Written by the family of Odessa Anne Box

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, August 8th at 7pm. Please bring a picture/photo of your child or sibling to share with the group.

There will be a meeting on Thursday, August 10th. at 7pm. for parents that have lost an infant, toddler, or have had a miscarriage or stillbirth. Contact Julie Joiner at 832-724-4299 if you are interested in attending this meeting.

A Warm Welcome to Our New Members - We're Glad You Found Us.

We offer our warmest welcome to our newest members, **Deanna Young, lost her son Jeffrey in October 2016; Steve and Donna Bell, lost their son Joshua in May this year; and Dan Waldron lost his son Nathan in March 2015.** If you have walked through the door to a TCF meeting, we understand how traumatic and difficult that is to do...we have all taken that step and reach out to you in friendship and support.

As our TCF Credo says, *"We come from different walks of life..."*, but the common bond we now share is the death of a beloved child, grandchild, or sibling. Others cannot understand the terrifying and debilitating emotional issues that occur in our daily lives once this event happens; a TCF member can and does!

We hope you will find our meetings and newsletters to be a source of comfort, a place where tears are allowed, no judgments are made and the hope that through this trauma, we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

Love Messages to Your Child

Please share with the group an article, poem or love message about your child. You can bring them to the next meeting or email them to me at llbrewer67@hotmail.com. With your permission I will include them in the next newsletter.

LIBRARY

Our chapter offers a lending library with a variety of books on grief and bereavement. We encourage you to browse our library and feel free to check out a book or CD to take home with you.

We only ask that you sign out the books and return them in a timely manner so others can have the benefit of the information as well. If you have borrowed a book from our library please remember to return it. You can drop it by anytime.

If you have read a book that was helpful to you and would like to share it with others, donating that book in your child's name is a wonderful way to honor them.

*You never know how **strong** you are until **strong** is the only choice you have.*

The Stress Test

On my desk is a little card that measures stress. It is similar to the “mood rings” of the 1970s in nature. If I am having a good day, the color is green. If I am particularly serene, the color is blue. Sometimes the color is black or red.....these are the bad days. Black equals stress; red equals tense.

If only our real emotions were that easy to measure and quantify. If only we could touch a card or a stone and find out if we are angry, sad, depressed, withdrawn, happy, balanced or “normal”. But, this does not exist.

Instead we must rely on our subjective minds to analyze what should be a very objective situation: where are we now? Only parents who have lost a child can relate to this statement. Where am I now? Yesterday seemed good, but today is terrible. I don't even want to get out of bed.

Then the guilt sets in: it is the American way to “get on with it”. The work ethic is part of the fabric of most of our lives. Be productive. Have accomplishments. Do things, tackle projects, keep on moving, moving, moving.

Sometimes that moving is really running: running from our demons. Can we analyze this for what it is? Can we ask ourselves what those demons might be? Can we go into the dark recesses of our minds and pull out the offensive demon and throw it into the stratosphere? Actually, we can.

I have done this many times. Some people do this with prayer, some with yoga, some with exercise, some with meditation, some with medication, some with reading, some with professional therapy, some with sheer willpower.

We each search for ways to deal with our grief, to analyze each phase of our grieving process, to help ourselves to help ourselves. What I have found to be most helpful in analyzing each phase of “demon purging” is the exponential value of talking with others who are also in grief. Asking questions of them will often answer questions of my own. I move forward one step after each Compassionate Friends meeting. It is a difficult step, a tearful, emotional step, a step that slides sideways and backwards and forwards and then finally settles. But it is the next step on the road of grief. I take that step and its lesson and I apply it for the next month.

The meter of measurement is what I tell myself before I go to sleep each night. Today was good because..... Tomorrow will be good because.....

Where did I learn this technique? I invented it 38 years ago. I invented it for my child. Each night before he fell asleep, we would read a book. Then, we would talk about his day. What was bad? How can you change it? What was good? How did it make you feel? What are you looking forward to tomorrow? Think about that while you fall asleep, I would tell him. Tomorrow will be a good day filled with whatever positive event he had mentioned. He would recite all the good things from his day and everything positive about tomorrow.

Even as teenager and later as an adult, my child and I would have these late night conversations. Our final night conversation was just 6 hours before he died. He was thinking positive, anticipating the good.

So now I continue the tradition. What was good today? What was bad? What am I looking forward to for tomorrow? There is always something positive. I analyze the things that went wrong and “sleep on” a solution.

So this is my stress test –not very complicated-something like a prayer for enlightenment and positive feelings. I discover my yo-yo emotions, my grief, my sadness and yet I remember the happiness and the hope. It helps me to sleep each night. Tomorrow will be better.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX

Exercise can be valuable in times of grief

From the Houston Chronicle

Written by Amanda Loudin

Washington Post

Twenty months ago, Tamara Grand experienced every mother's greatest fear: the loss of a child. Struggling with her grief, the 49-year old personal trainer turned to what has always been her first line of defense when dealing with stress: exercise. While nothing could fill the hole in Grand's heart, she has found that movement makes it easier to face her grief and to move forward.

Robert Neimeyer, a psychology professor at the University of Memphis whose research and practice focuses on bereavement, says that while exercise is by no means a panacea, it can play a valuable role in adapting to loss.

"It provides both direct benefits to mood and health and indirect benefits as it forces you out of isolation and into the world", he said.

Allison Gilbert, a New York based grief expert and author of "Passes and Present," says that what grief takes away-energy, joy, focus-exercise can give back.

"Death of a loved one involves so many emotional drains," she explains. "Exercise allows you to come into a space where you can focus on yourself and helps decrease the pulls on your energy. It restores some of your buoyancy."

The link between exercise and depression, often a hallmark of grief, is well documented. George Mammen, a University of Toronto Ph.D. candidate, reviewed 25 pieces of research and concluded that moderate exercise can boost mood and can help ward off depression in the long term.

"Many studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of exercise regimens in improving mood for people who are moderately depressed, effects that are observed within a few weeks of beginning a fitness program," Neimeyer says.

Positive Outcomes

It doesn't end with the emotional benefits, either. Neimeyer points out that fitness "pushes back" against the physical health risks of bereavement.

"Research suggests that having a regular exercise routine introduces a healthy structure into life, contributing to better nutrition and sleep patterns." he says. "In this way, exercise promotes positive outcomes and indirectly mitigates the negative impact of grief, such as eating poorly or relying on vices to perk us up or calm us down."

Numerous studies have looked at exercise as a method for treating depression. Patrick Smith, a psychiatry associate professor at Duke University and co-author of several studies on the topic including "Is Exercise a Viable Treatment for Depression?," says, "The short story is that in most head-to-head studies exercise is equally as effective as antidepressants.

Gilbert says that ideally, exercise is transformational during grief.

It's an opportunity to remove stress and gain the capacity to build resilience and make yourself happy.

In the early stages of grief, it is easy to be passive and to let others take care of you. Through my own personal loss, I learned that it was up to me to move forward and find joy and happiness. As the support goes away, it's crucial to take the reins and take care of yourself.



New Research Offers Hope

I recently learned of a wonderful new website that may benefit many members of TCF Alamo Area Chapter and other bereaved parents. Researchers and scientists are just now starting to understand the emotion of grief and the devastating effects of protracted grief. Unresolved mourning now has a name. It now can be identified as a condition: Complicated Grief. At least 10% of those individuals suffering from grief may actually have complicated grief. That percentage may increase substantially for grieving parents who are especially at risk. The death of a child brings on a grief that in magnitude surpasses all others in its complexity. Complicated grief manifests in prolonged mourning with increased symptoms over time. It is unrelenting. It is also very difficult to find peace and happiness when suffering from complicated grief. The complexity of complicated grief is part and parcel to unresolved issues such as anger, guilt, regret and unfound forgiveness which can feed into this condition. Those who have complicated grief often have thought patterns regarding their loved one's death, in which they obsess about the overwhelming thought of, "if only", or "what might have been." Practitioners refer to this thought process as *Magical Thinking*.

The Center for Complicated Grief was launched by Columbia University School of Social Work in February, 2013. I would like to recommend that as bereaved parents we take a look deep within ourselves and ask, "Am I suffering from complicated grief?" Log on to the website: www.complicatedgrief.org. There you will find a checklist of the 11 symptoms of complicated grief and the resources for treatment. We will always have a hole in our hearts that only our child could fill. I believe that together we can learn to live a full life despite of our loss.

Janet Reyes
TCF Alamo Area Chapter, TX

Take care of yourself

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

Face your feelings. You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to your loved one.

Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel healthy physically, you'll be better able to cope emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and [exercising](#). Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.

Try to maintain your hobbies and interests. There's comfort in routine and getting back to the activities that bring you joy and connect you closer to others can help you come to terms with your loss and aid the grieving process.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

Plan ahead for grief "triggers." Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.



GRIEF AND YOUR HEALTH

6/21/2014

Author: Margaret Gerner

The loss of a loved one to death is a life-shattering experience. It affects us physically as well as emotionally. The grief we experience is felt on an emotional level, and the stress of these emotions can create havoc with our bodies.

If we had a physical illness before our loved one died, our grief can exacerbate the existing illness. It can also open the way for physical illness if we have been previously healthy. Grief makes us susceptible to diseases such as the common cold, sore throats, and other infections. Other diseases shown to be connected to the stress of grief are ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, heart disease, and cancer.

The connection between the mind and body is not always recognized, but there is real scientific evidence that what we think and feel has a direct effect on our biological systems. This is an especially important issue for bereaved people because the loss of a loved one is the ultimate in stress—a stress that can last a very long time.

Bodies of all human beings and animals alike react to stress in basically the same manner. In 1944, Hans Selye a neurophysiologist formulated the three phases of stress reactions, but it is only recently that scientists could identify with considerable accuracy what actually takes place. According to Selye the reaction to stress happens in three phases, but for our purposes we will only discuss phase one.

The first phase, or the alarm reaction, occurs immediately on contact with the stressor—grief at the death of our loved one. At the death, the brain "translates" the stress of grief into a chemical reaction in the body. The pituitary gland located at the base of the brain is stimulated to produce a hormone called adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). This reaction is a protective one and, in essence, makes the body ready to do battle. The ACTH from the pituitary gland then travels to the adrenal gland, a gland at the top of the kidneys, which causes a chemical reaction which ultimately produces cortisone. As the cortisone level increases, it causes the production of ACTH to level off. This circle of the building up of one chemical that stimulates the production of another chemical that turns off the original one is known as biofeedback.

But what happens in the case of grief, when the stress continues for many months and the biofeedback does not operate as it should? Because the stress is continuing, the production of ACTH is continuing, thus causing the adrenal gland to produce more and more cortisone. The result is an abnormally high level of cortisone circulating in the blood, sometimes exceeding ten to twenty times the normal levels.

A high level of cortisone is one of the things that causes our immune system (the system that normally fights off disease-carrying bacteria, fungi, and viruses) to falter. The high level of cortisone affects yet another gland, the thalamus, which manufactures the white cells of our blood. With the thalamus not functioning properly, it cannot produce white cells that are effective. Those white cells normally locate and phagocytize (eat up) the invading germs, viral particles, and even pre-cancerous cells. Thus with the white cells unable to function properly, the individual is much more susceptible to the most common germs.

Of course, this is an over simplified description of the chemistry of stress, but knowing that there is a legitimate reason for susceptibility to illness during grief encourages us to take preventive measures.

Just knowing that various manifestations— changes in eating habits, problems with sleeping, restlessness, lack of physical energy—are a normal part of the grieving process will lessen the stress to some extent.

Another way to lessen the stress, and probably the most helpful, is to acknowledge and appropriately express the emotions that we feel during grief. This can considerably decrease the potential for illness to develop because it displaces and releases the tension brought on by the stress of grief. And certainly good nutrition, exercise, and proper rest are essential preventive measures.

Another point to consider, too, is that the stress of grief is rarely the only stress we are experiencing at the time of our loved one's death. Problems in our marriage or with our surviving children or siblings are examples of the other stresses that may be added to the stress of grief. Put a number of stresses together and our bodies will surely suffer.

We must be very aware that our loved one's death, and the resultant grief, is a legitimate reason for physical illness. We must do whatever we can to lessen our susceptibility. Heading directly into our grief and allowing ourselves to face our painful emotions is the most helpful thing we can do. Talking about our loved one and the circumstances of the death, crying when we need to, and talking with someone who will listen non-judgmentally to our anger and guilt is the primary way to successfully resolve our grief-and ultimately resolve the stress that is caused by the grief.

Many bereaved people experience some kind of physical illness in the first four to six months after the death of their loved one. For most, the illness can be directly tied into the extreme stress of their loved one's death.

I know it is hard to be concerned about yourself physically when you hurt so badly emotionally. But remember, you will not always be in this much emotional pain. Remember, too, if you have damaged your body in the early months of grief, you run the risk of never completely recovering from the physical illness-and recovery for bereaved people means recovery in body as well as mind.



Self Help

For many of us, the monthly meeting of our Compassionate Friends Group is the only real healing time we give to ourselves. Helping ourselves on a daily basis is critical to our journey in the grieving process.

Many of us find solace in books. Others find it in movies, music, time with friends, meditation or intense spiritual conviction. Each day we should take some time to center ourselves, to find a place of peace.

If you haven't already done so, start with a quiet time of reflection and search your soul for the key to your own solace. There will still be bad, even terrible, days. The effort to help ourselves begins with knowing ourselves and finding the unique activity that soothes our broken hearts for just a little while.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX

Dear Grief,

I see you. I promise to take good care of you and help you transform into memories that will bring me joy. It will take time but we will work this out together. -V

The reality is you will grieve forever... you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same again. Nor should you be the same, nor should you want to.

-Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

The journey of grief can seem bleak and lonely
Look in front of you...
there are others encouraging and guiding you
Look beside you...
there are others on the same journey
Look behind you...
there are others encouraged by you
We are not alone on this journey.

Phone Friends

All of the people on the following list are bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. They understand what you are going through and have all wished to be included in this list in the hope that anyone who needs to talk will reach out to them. They are willing to talk with you at any time you need their support. Some have listed the specific area in which they have personal experience but they do not intend to imply that that is the only topic they wish to talk about. We all have experienced this journey through grief and it encompasses much more than the specifics surrounding our individual loss. Having a compassionate person to listen when you are having a bad day or just need someone to reach out to when you feel overwhelmed can make the difference in getting through one more day. We have all been there and understand, please feel free to contact any one of us.

Laura Hengel
281-908-5197
linnemanl@aol.com
Auto Accident

Pat Morgan
713-462-7405
angeltrack@aol.com
Adult Child

Connie Brandt
281-320-9973
clynncooper@hotmail.com
Auto Accident

Beth Crocker
281-923-5196
thecrockers3@comcast.net
Multiple Loss
Heart Disease

Julie Joiner
832-724-4299
dtjb19@gmail.com
Multiple Loss
Infant Child

Loretta Stephens
281-782-8182
andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net
Auto Accident

Lisa Thompson
281-257-6837
lisalou862@yahoo.com
Fire

Pat Gallien
281-732-6399
agmom03@aol.com
Organ Donor

Leigh Heard-Boyer
281-785-6170
boyerbetterhalf@yahoo.com
Substance Abuse

FOR FATHERS:

Nick Crocker
832-458-9224
thecrockers3@comcast.net
Multiple Loss
Heart Disease

David Hendricks
936-441-3840
dbhhendricks@hotmail.com
Auto Accident

Glenn Wilkerson
832-878-7113
glennwilkerson@sbcglobal.net
Infant Child