



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.

MARCH 2026

HOUSTON NORTHWEST CHAPTER

www.houstonnorthwesttcf.org

We meet the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm.

(Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 10th)

Trinity Lutheran Church

Family Life Center #116

5201 Spring Cypress Rd.

Spring, TX 77379

The Church is located on the corner of Spring Cypress Road and Klein Church Road. Please enter off Spring Cypress Road. The meetings are held in The Family Life Center, Room #116.

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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.





MARCH BIRTHDAYS

- 1983- Aaron James O'Neil, Son of Lisa Thompson
1990- Charles James Booth, Son of Mary Booth
1993- Alex John Piniewski, Son of Bob & Christi Piniewski
1981- Hugo Alberto DeLeon, Son of Lupita DeLeon
1989- Todd Perotka II, Son of Todd & Tonya Perotka
1998- Liam Young, Son of Jill Young
1974- Heather Ann Varosky, Daughter of Edward & Ann Varosky
1988- Kate Bronstein, Daughter of Pat Bronstein
1994-Samantha Campos, Daughter of Amy Arrant
2011- Landyn Elizabeth Tickle, Daughter of Matthew & Shelby Tickle
Granddaughter of Brenda Strahan
1983- Rikki Ashley Brown, Daughter of Mike & Gwen Williams
2012 – Annabelle Opal, Daughter of Pearl Fisher
2003 - Austin Haecker, Son of Debbie Haecker, Grandson of Carolyn Cooper
1952 - Gene Ware, Son of Roberta Ware
1994 - Joshua Pham, Son of Tony & Peach Pham, grandson of Susan Endaluz
1995 - April Ann Ulrich, Daughter of Josette & Doug Tharp
1979 - Kyla, Daughter of Ron O'Farrell
1973 - Amy Lynn Kramberger, Daughter of Nancy & Ken Thornton
1966 - Jeffrey Scott Byers, Son of Deanna Young
1999 - Evelyn Sweat, Daughter of Nathan & Anna Sweat
1984 - Brian Smith, Son of Cindy Smith
2001 - Grace Sanders, Daughter of Mary Parker
1998 - Brayden, Son of Bill and Lisa Miluszusky
1988 - Danielle Devillier, Daughter of Wendy Devillier
1986 – Amber Faith Dawson, Daughter of Michael Dawson
1990 – Ryan Freeman, Son of Robin Brooks
2005 – Steve Cruz, Son of Manuel and Heather Cruz
1989 – Melissa Zingelmann, Daughter of Cindy Zingelmann

MARCH ANGEL DATES

- 1993- Richard Allen Ginn, Son of Barbara & Richard Ginn
2008- Pamela Ann Roberson, Daughter of Doris & Dale Hockstra
2002- Brittany Idabell Miller, Daughter of George & Kathy Miller
2001- Jenny Nolan Burgess, Daughter of Jenelle Chamberlain
2010- Kelsey Buzzanco, Son of Jane Winter
2008- Syrina Snow Salazar, Daughter of April R. Torres
2009- Todd Perotka II, Son of Todd & Tonya Perotka
2007- Heather Ann Varosky, Daughter of Edward & Ann Varosky
2008- Amanda Cristina Ramirez-Velazquez, Daughter of Cynthia Cruz
2010- Jason Allen Denbo, Son of Donna J. Denbo
1999- Cheyenne Crocker, Daughter of Beth & Nick Crocker
2001- Jason R. Kramberger, Son of Nancy & Ken Thornton
2008- Samantha Alonso, Daughter of Joanna Alonso
2010-Julee Ann Serna, Daughter of Virginia Serna
2006-Gregory Lynn Meier, Son of Gary Meier
2008- Chance Wilcox, Son of Shelli Ralls
1992- Kylar Shotwell, Daughter of Tracy Bradley
2012 – Annabelle Opal, Daughter of Pearl Fisher
2013 – Ryan Bennett, Son of Dan & Cindy Bennett
2014 - Julie Less, Daughter of Jim Less, Sister of Susan Less
2015 - Moriah Clay, Daughter of Kim Clay
2015 - Nathan Waldron, Son of Dan Waldron
2017 - Jerret Macias, Son of Betty Macias
2018 - Zach Doss, Son of Susan Doss
2022 - Jennifer, Daughter of Jim and Donna Bryson
2024 – Ryan Freeman, Son of Robin Brooks
2025 – Gavin Shaunty, Son of Matt and Jen Shaunty

When the links of life are broken and a child has to part, there is nothing that will ever heal a parents' broken heart.

Grief does not ever expire.

CHAPTER NEWS

Our next meeting is Tuesday, March 10th. at 7pm.

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

We offer our warmest welcome to our new member, **Dorah Ramirez, lost her son Davy in September 2025.** 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.

If you have recently attended your first meeting, you may have left feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. With the heavy load of grief you are carrying, you may feel that you cannot bear to hear about all the pain shared in meetings. Consequently, you may have decided not to return.

These feelings are common to all our members, many of whom resolved not to expose themselves to such anguish again, but were drawn back by the knowledge that they were among those who "know how you feel".

Please give us at least three tries before you decide if these meetings are for you.

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 support which will help you travel this journey of grief, and we can once again find hope and meaning in our lives.

TCF NATIONAL CONFERENCE

July 2-5 2026



The graphic features a circular logo on the left with a green anchor in the center. The text around the anchor reads "ANCHORED IN LOVE" at the top and "HARBORING HOPE TOGETHER" at the bottom. To the right of the logo, the text "TCF's 49th National Conference" is displayed in a large, bold, black serif font, with "Baltimore, MD | July 2-5, 2026" in a smaller, black serif font below it. At the bottom of the graphic, the phrase "Registration Now Open" is written in a large, elegant, black cursive script. The background of the graphic is a scenic view of a city skyline at sunset, with a marina in the foreground filled with boats.

Special introductory registration rate of \$245 available through March 16, 2026. This is a savings of \$75 off of the regular registration rate. TCF's National Conference is an enriching and supportive event for many newer and long-time bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings. Attendees come and find renewed hope and support, as well as strategies for coping with grief, all while making friendships with other bereaved people who truly understand the heartbreaking loss of a child, sibling, or grandchild. Lifelong friendships are often formed and rekindled each year at TCF conferences.

Hotel Reservations

This year's conference will be held at the Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor. Reservations can now be made online at TCF's dedicated [reservation link](#). Our discounted room rate with the Hilton is \$189 per night (*reg. \$334+/night*) plus applicable taxes and fees. Please note that each attendee can reserve a maximum of two rooms. Many attendees arrive on Thursday since the conference begins early on Friday morning. We also have pre-conference activities that are offered on Thursday evening, that attendees find beneficial. We look forward to seeing you in Baltimore!

Several of our members have gone to past TCF National Conferences. Here are their thoughts on the experience.

The Compassionate Friends is an organization that extends its' hands in friendship and its' heart in understanding. The Compassionate Friends National Conference gives you the opportunity to recharge your batteries in the company of friends, both new and old, sit in your choice of over 100 workshops, spend some quiet time in the Reflection Room, and participate in activities ranging from sharing sessions, to banquets, to special entertainment. There are bookstores for bereavement materials, special gifts, and mementos that can be purchased in the Butterfly Boutique.

Thousands of bereaved family members have found comfort and support by sharing their grief experiences with others at these conferences. You will take away from this conference the knowledge that you will survive, and that one day you will even smile and laugh again.

I have had the opportunity to attend The Compassionate Friends National Conference twice. There are several workshops that cater to circumstances of your loss that you can take part in. Such workshops include, teenage car accidents, suicide, illness, infant death, murder etc., There are also workshops for Surviving Siblings and Grandparents. You will also find workshops on "Now Childless".

This year's conference will be held in Baltimore, MD July 2-5, 2026 at the Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor Hotel. The final day of the conference ends with a Walk to Remember. It's a 3 mile walk throughout the hosting city. This is a symbolic way to celebrate and honor the lives of thousands of our children who have died, but will always be carried in our hearts. All are welcome to register and participate in this meaningful event. You do not have to walk the entire distance.

If you have any questions regarding the conference feel free to contact myself Loretta Stephens andersonloretta@sbcglobal.net or Pat Gallien agmom03@aol.com

There are no easy paths to finding your way through your grief, but The Compassionate Friends organization and its members are here so that you will never have to feel alone in your journey.



On Gratitude

My feet were cold from the icy pavement as I waited for the morning bus. The bitter winter was receding and I was working hard on gratitude. I bent my head deeper into my scarf and saw a penny in the street.

I had just returned from a regional meeting of The Compassionate Friends in Green Bay, Wisconsin. A presenter held up his 'Pennies from Heaven' and declared that signs from our loved ones are everywhere. I wonder...

I picked up that penny and found my reading glasses.

I work on gratitude with some skepticism. Was this a treasure or just a muddy little coin? The date imprinted in the copper became clear—1983—the year my son was born.

Surprise and tears triggered by that date immediately washed across my face. I no longer felt cold. I meandered through memories of a day in July some 20+ years ago when I delivered that child.

"Collect yourself," I said to myself under my breath. I might scare my mass transit bus mates. In the cold air I turned my face away from the others and watched my breath puff into icy clouds.

The bus appeared and I boarded with everyone else. I was a penny richer that day and grateful beyond measure for the treasure trove of memories that lay in my hand.

Monica Colberg TCF Minneapolis, MN
In Memory of my son Art



And Then There Was Hope

Once, in what is now another life, I thought support groups were for someone else. I felt that with research, personal work, discussions with the elders in my family and wise friends, I would find all the answers I needed. This worked well until December of 2002. My son died. The death of my only child changed everything. My standard methods of "self help" were not going to get me through this. I needed more than even Solomon could give me. And I desperately needed hope.

My first meeting at Compassionate Friends was in March of 2003. My son had been gone almost three months; I was traumatized, I could not speak and I was doubtful that I would ever find even an obscure hint of peace in my life. April's meeting was somewhat better. I spoke a few words. In May I was rocked by the dual anticipation of Mother's Day and my son's birthday. In June I participated in the balloon liftoff; I sprained my ankle as we were walking back from the park. That night, as I set at home with ice on my ankle, I thought about the past five months. I realized that I was a different person than I had been earlier in the year. I was no longer the woman who walked into her first Compassionate Friends meeting because I was no longer walking alone. There were others at my side, in front of me, behind me, encouraging me, offering gentle suggestions, understanding and listening as I told my child's story over and over and over again.

I discovered that those who had walked this road before me were holding the lanterns of hope to cast light on my life path. It was these people and only these people who could reach me, who could teach me, whose voices could penetrate my fog, whose hearts could help me to begin the healing process.

By the time I marked the first anniversary of my son's death, I was beginning to discover that I had been transformed into a different person. Like my child whose body had died but whose spirit lived on symbolically in the butterfly, I had become a different person. I physically felt the pain of other parents. The first time I offered advice I sat in wonder at the realization that this very effort brought a little more light into my soul. Part of my healing process became the helping process.

Healing is what we seek, but we will never be "cured". As parents who have lost our children, we will never be the same people we were before our child died. I came to accept this fact. But I also found that we can live with this wound which, despite our initial certainty to the contrary, is not usually fatal. It is forever, it is painful, it is the worst wound a human can feel, but it is not fatal. Even when I was wracked with physical pain in my grief, the light of my Compassionate Friends gave me a new perspective, one of hope.

Yes, a part of me died with my son, but the part that remains is constantly changing, continually evolving and always reaching for the light of hope. We each choose different ways to reach for hope, to live our lives as well as we possibly can without our precious children. But eventually we all awaken to hope.

My hope did not come as an epiphany out of the blue, but rather, it was more like a false dawn followed by true, muted rays of the morning sun. My hope was a process. I engaged the process by reaching out to others, listening, learning. I learned that the quick answer is rarely the right answer. I learned that silence often says more than words. I made peace with my pain, and I began to reach out to others with words of hope. For words were my gift to those who had given me so much.

At Compassionate Friends we see many new faces each year. Most parents continue their relationship with the group for at least a year, some for even two years. A few stay three years. The good news is that those who do not choose to come to meetings have chosen to go forward with their lives in a different way. Going forward with their lives is a very positive step

and the goal of each bereaved parent. Not all of us stay; not all of us should stay. But for some of us, the hope continues to rekindle at each meeting. As we meet the newly bereaved and listen to their story, to their child's story, to the outpouring of pure agony and heartbreak, we hold the lantern. These parents will not know exactly what it is that we are doing as they are lost in the fog, as we all once were. Yet, we quietly hold the lantern, we keep the chapter moving forward, we meet parents and talk about their children, about our children, about grief, about life, about death, about pain and about hope. I have chosen to stay and hold the lantern for those who have followed me. For this gives me hope and peace and it keeps my child close to me in even the darkest of nights.

As grief is our companion, time moves forward; the pain becomes less searing, less encompassing. We learn to co-exist with our loss. We treasure our memories, we love our children and our hearts ache with our terrible loss. Yet, we have moved forward on the path. We are holding the lantern for others who find themselves on this path in life. We give this gift of hope with our presence which symbolizes the future of every newly bereaved parent. I remember my child as I walk this road with you.

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



For Loved Ones Lost From My Special Angel:

The gap between those who have lost children and those who have not is profoundly difficult to bridge. No one whose children are well and intact can be expected to understand what parents who have lost children have absorbed, what they bear. Our children now come to us through every blade of grass, every crack in the sidewalk, every bowl of breakfast cereal, every kid on a scooter. We seek contact with their atoms – their hairbrushes, toothbrushes, their clothing.

We reach out for what was integrally woven into the fabric of our lives, now torn and shredded. A black hole has been blown through our souls and, indeed, it often does not allow the light to escape. It is a difficult place. For us to enter there is to be cut deeply and torn anew, each time we go there, by the jagged edges of our loss. Yet we return, again and again, for that is where our children now reside. This will be so for years to come and it will change us, profoundly. At some point, in the distant future, the edges of that hole will have tempered and softened, but the empty space will remain—a life sentence.

Our friends will change through this. There is no avoiding it. We grieve for our children in part, through talking about them, and our feelings for having lost them. Some go there with us; others cannot and, through their denial, add a further measure, however unwitting, to an already heavy burden. Assuming that we may be feeling “better” 6 months later is simply “to not get it”. The excruciating and isolating reality that bereaved parents feel is hermetically sealed from the nature of any other human experience. Thus it is a trap—those whose compassion and insight we most need are those for whom we abhor the experience that would allow them that sensitivity and

capacity. And yet, somehow, there are those, each in their own fashion, who have found a way to reach us and stay, to our immeasurable comfort. They have understood, again each in their own way, that our children remain our children through our memory of them. Their memory is sustained through speaking about them and our feelings about their death. Deny this and you deny their life. Deny their life and you have no place in ours.

We recognize that we have moved to an emotional place where it is often very difficult to reach us. Our attempts to be normal are painful, and the day to day carries a silent, screaming anguish that accompanies us, sometimes from moment to moment. Were we to give it its own voice, we fear we would become truly unreachable and so we remain “strong” for a host of reasons even as the strength saps our energy and drains our will. Were we to act out our true feelings, we would be impossible to be with. We resent having to act normal, yet we dare not do otherwise.

People who understand this dynamic are our gold standard. Working our way through this over the years will change us as does every experience— and extreme experience changes one extremely. We know we will have actually managed to survive when, as we have read, it is no longer so painful to be normal. We do not know who we will be at that point nor who will still be with us.

We have read that the gap is so difficult that, often, bereaved parents must attempt to reach out to friends and relatives or risk losing them. This is our attempt. For those untarnished by such events, who wish to know in some way what they, thankfully, do not know, read this. It may provide a window that is helpful for both sides of the gap.



The Toffice

Soon after we lost Tom, I started organizing the things in his room to pull out what I wanted to keep and what I would pack up to go to storage. Part of me was hopeful I would find more hints about what led to his death, but I did not find anything enlightening, which in a way was kind of a relief. If there had been something there, it would have been impossible to forgive myself for not finding it when he was alive.

I am glad I went through everything early on rather than waiting. I am pretty sure the longer I would have waited, the more difficult it would have been for me, and I would have ended up with a room which was more a shrine to his memory than usable space. His bed and most of his personal items went to storage, but we kept out some special items. In the closet, there are just a

few pieces of his clothing which still smell like him and the guitar his stepfather, L.J., and I bought him for Christmas last year. Some of his tchotchkes are on the shelves including a stuffed white Pat the Bunny I decorated with red spots when he had a viral infection which did the same to his skin, a stuffed flying monkey from the day we saw *Wicked* together, and some special stuffed animals he bought me over the years for Mother's Day, Christmas, my birthday, and when he travelled to Disneyland with his father. His last school picture, his fedora and a funny note he wrote in my drama class sit on one of the shelves next to his ashes, along with a battery operated candle with a yellow ribbon which turns on for a few hours each night. So there are nods to him without his presence overwhelming the space.

L.J. and I talked about how best to use this newly open space in our home. We decided to turn the room into a place for my desk. The boys and I used to share the family room for all three of our computer desks, and when Tim left for college, it was just Tom and me using that room each afternoon. He would do his homework, and I would work on my contract work. I can remember making work video calls and Tom waving to people over my shoulder and all of us laughing out loud about it. So when Tom passed, the family room felt empty with them both gone. Using Tom's room as a workspace seemed like a reasonable decision. We rearranged Tom's bookcases and moved my desk in there. We painted the walls a soft beige and although the flooring still needs work, I am now using the space almost daily.

Figuring out what to call the room has been a struggle. It feels wrong to call it "my office" after being Tom's room for more than 16 years. But logically, in his absence, it no longer functions as his room. So for months now we have been referring to it by both names, trying to figure out what feels right. When I call it "my office," it feels empty and like I have cut him out of the history of the room. But when I call it "Tom's room," it seems like I am refusing to move forward. Although this seems like such a small issue in the big picture of life, it has been heavy on my heart for quite some time.

A few days ago, I referred to it as "The Toffice." I think it came out that way by accident, a combination of "Tom's room" and "the office," magically merged by my brain and tumbling out without thought. But as soon as I said it, it felt right. Because the room will always be where we laughed and cried together, had our serious talks, where his dad and I read to him at night, and where I fell asleep with him after singing him to sleep. (*Fly me to the Moon* was his favorite.) So it only seems appropriate we do not completely remove him from the room's identity. And when I am in there, I cannot help think of him and the joy he brought me. A day does not go by that I do not think of him a hundred times. And when I am in "The Toffice" working, I feel a little lighter and a little closer to him.

Kimberly Starr
TCF Facebook Loss to Suicide Group
In Memory of my son Tom

A Time for Renewal

Spring has wrapped us in the glory of floral bounty with flowers, blooming bushes and trees and wild bluebonnets hinting at a renewal. In the gentle rains we have received a sweet cleansing of the spirit. It is spring that gives us hope for the future. As the season changes, we sense the cloak of our grief lifting in tiny increments. Yes, it is uplifting. For those of us who are newly bereaved parents or siblings, discovering a bit of lightness in our grief mantle is so very welcome.

And that is how our grief will be for the rest of our lives. No epiphanies, no giant steps, just a slight lifting each day, a microscopic rebirth of ourselves and a step further into our lives after the death of our child. There are setbacks, of course. The pain is agony in the first year.....brain pain, soul searing pain, physical pain, anxiety and much more seem to rule our days. But each day is a tiny step forward into hope.

To enhance our grief journey, we must do grief work. Just as the gardener tends to the soil, fertilizes, gently stimulates tender roots and removes weeds from the flower bed, we must tend to our grief on a daily basis. Throwing out the negative...the guilt, the anger, the anxiety and adding the positive by seeking our solace in our journals, reading, movie choices, spirituality, friendships kept and friendships left behind. In the garden of our psyche, our grief must be tended as if everyday is the first day of spring.

And so it is that with springtime comes a reminder of renewal and the grief work we must do to obtain that renewal of spring. Day by day we change; month by month we make note of that change. One day we are able to see the blossoming of our renewal as we move forward in life with our precious children in our hearts.

Annette Mennen Baldwin

TCF Katy, TX

In Memory of my son, Todd Mennen



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.

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