



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest

NEWSLETTER

The mission of The Compassionate Friends is to assist families in the positive resolution of grief following the death of a child and to provide information to help others be supportive.

Special Newsletter

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YOU ARE INVITED

The Compassionate Friends - Metrowest Chapter meets twice a month. Evenings on the third Tuesday from 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm in the library of St. Mary's Parish Center, Route 16, Washington St., Holliston. The parish center is located between the church and the rectory.

The **Tuesday** afternoon meetings will be held on the last Tuesday of the month next to St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Milford at the parish center. **Please call Ed or Joan Motuzas at (508) 473-4239 by the last Monday or earlier if you plan to attend.**

Directions.... On Route 16 (Main St.) going north through downtown Milford (Main St.) at Tedeschi's Market on the left, take a left at the lights onto Winter St. The parish center is the last building before the church.

Going south on Route 16 (East Main St.) after Sacred Heart Church on the left. Bear right on Main St., continue past Dunkin' Donuts on the right, proceed to the next set of lights and take a right onto Winter St. There is parking on both sides of the street. Look for Compassionate Friends signs to meeting room.

WHO ARE WE?

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings.

Our primary purpose is to assist the bereaved in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents and siblings for those who wish to understand. Our objective is to help members of the community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers, and professionals to be supportive.

Meetings are open to all bereaved parents and siblings. No dues or fees are required to belong to the Metrowest Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.

A Very Special Newsletter...

This newsletter is a special newsletter in that it is only sent out to **bereaved parents who have experienced the loss of their child through suicide.**

The intent of this newsletter is to get information to parents and siblings that will help them cope with these new and profound feelings that are very hard to understand upon the death of a child or sibling through suicide.

The Compassionate Friends are here for you.

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Our 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 many 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 no 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 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.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Chapter Information

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 * Joan Motuzas 508/473-4239

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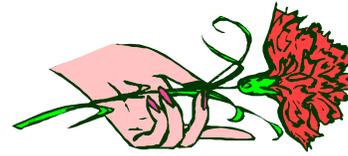
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The Compassionate Friends has a national office that supports and coordinates chapter activities. The national office can be reached as follows:

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TO PARENTS WHO HAVE LOST A CHILD THROUGH SUICIDE:



Parents and siblings of a young person who has completed suicide face an almost overwhelming burden of emotions. It is one of the cruelest tragedies that can happen to a family. To pull oneself out of the emotional wreckage is a mighty struggle. Each parent can be utterly devastated and unable to be supportive to their mate or to their surviving children. Other family members are shocked and unable to cope with the event. They do not know how to console or help us. Our friends wonder, "How could such a thing happen?" They, too, do not know how to help us. We struggle with the whys...the unanswered questions and painful memories.

We who count ourselves as survivors, we've made it a year, two years, some of us are in the third year, would like to share a few thoughts.

First, you are not alone. We understand whatever you may be feeling, for we have "been there!" Suicide can intensify the feelings of shock, denial, guilt, anger, depression — all a part of the grief process. The course of recovery is up and down... Give yourself plenty of time. You need a great deal of support, at least through the first year. The suicide of one's child raises painful questions and doubts and fears. We can find ourselves in a spiritual crisis. We question our beliefs and may feel cut off from God. Through sharing with others and listening to others who have walked the same path, you may gain some understanding of your reactions and learn some ways to cope.

But, most of all, we, who are in the process of rebuilding our lives, have not forgotten the dark hours of those early days and weeks when we thought we could not live again. We cannot offer you any shortcut through the pain. There isn't any. But you can help yourself along the way to healing. We can offer you support, encouragement and the hand of friendship.

Jo Ann Dodson
TCF, Louisville, KY



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



THE GRIEF OF MENTAL ILLNESS

by Carole Katz

I know now that my daughter LAURIE was mentally ill. I did not understand the meaning of this 20 years ago when her depression and "strange" behavior preceded a suicide attempt while in college. Despite all the help we could get for her, she succeeded in completing suicide five years later, at the age of 25, in 1980.

Her Psychiatrist then agreed to talk to me - he said, with tears in his eyes, she had been a serious schizophrenic patient. For reasons of patient confidentiality, I was not privy to this information earlier. WHY couldn't I have learned about this before it was too late?

The grief I felt as a bereaved parent was compounded by the truth of her illness. There is a stigma with mental illness. Society has been slow to understand and to accept mental illness. There is grief with mental illness - for the loss of the child that we wanted to be normal. Why did this have to happen to my child?

Was this my fault? Guilt rears its ugly head. Why didn't I see the early signs that she needed help? I felt anger - wanting to blame others for what happened. I was frustrated - with the Professionals who could not/did not "fix it." I was disillusioned with the public and private mental health system and its limited resources for the mentally ill and their families. Laurie fell between the cracks and is gone.

Thirteen years later I have come to terms with her suicide. I know now there are many reasons for mental illness, most of which are beyond my control. Mental illness is a disease. It can be the result of genetics, a chemical imbalance in the brain, or a nutritional deficiency/allergy - NOT bad parenting.

I have learned that in grief and in loss, most people want to/need to "talk about it." The magic of sharing feelings and experiences with others who understand (because they've been there), is a healing process. For me, The Compassionate Friends, a national peer-support organization for bereaved parents and siblings, has provided this outlet on a local and national level. I have also participated in a local chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and have learned so much more about mental illness through sharing with others who are coping with this stigma and grief. The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill's slogan in 1991 was "The most shocking thing about mental illness is how little people understand it!" How true! How sad!

After Laurie's suicide, initially the most therapeutic healing for me was to publish a book of her writings - Laurie, Laurie. Halleluiah! - material I found expressing her thoughts, visions and frustrations from the ages of 15 to 25.

This actual documentation of a mentally ill young person is poetic, loving, humorous, depressing and spiritual. Perhaps her words will help others to see and understand this disease. Her words express intuitive insights in a most articulate way, despite the message of helplessness and hopelessness. As a bereaved parent I felt a strong motivation to perpetuate the memory of Laurie in a positive way.

Public education, and acceptance, of mental illness as a disease is helping to change attitudes. We are learning to be more open and honest about it. We are learning to cope and go on with our lives. I can now see Laurie's suicide as an act of courage. She no longer wanted to be a burden to her family and this act could release her from the unrelenting pain of her illness.

Maybe it was the mother in me, but I never thought I would lose her. Now through the grief and later understanding of this disease I have found a new purpose in my life. Reaching out to help others caught in the quagmire of grief - from mental illness, from suicide, from the death of a child, through support groups and writings, in turn has been a healing process for me, too. I know that Laurie's 25 years on this earth have made a difference.

As Long As I Can

As long as I can, I will look at the world for both of us. As long as I can, I will laugh with the bird, I will sing with flowers, I will play to the stars, for both of us. As long as I can, I will remember how many things on this earth were your joy. And I will live as well as you would want me to live, as long as I can.

by Sascha

(Sascha's son Nina drowned at age 3; years later, her daughter Eve died by suicide at age 21.)





THE SIBLING CORNER



This page is dedicated to siblings together adjusting to grief thru encouragement & sharing

The Aftermath of Suicide (A Sibling's Viewpoint)

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

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
Reprinted from ICE,
Orange Coast, Oct. 1998*

“I couldn't even begin to guess how many times I said, I can't believe this is happening.”

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?"

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.
Reprinted from Obelisk Vol. 15, No. 45, a publication of
Catholic Charities LOSS Program, Chicago, Illinois.*



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



What I Have Learned about Grief and Myself in the Year Since Our Son's Suicide

Just as it is necessary for a parent to keep changing the relationship with his child as the child grows and matures, so at a child's death it is also necessary (though painful) to begin to structure a final realistic, enduring relationship that will provide a comfortable substitute for the love and hope a parent enjoys with a loving child.

When we lose a loved one, the loss leaves within us a hole that he or she once occupied. The greater the love, the bigger and deeper the hold. Time will heal the wound, but it is what we put into the hold (in the form of love and compassion, caring and sharing with others) that determines whether we will ever become whole again, or if we will for the rest of our lives be emotionally handicapped and deformed.

While others may find this controversial, I have come to realize that suicide is just another way to die and quite a formal way for the emotionally handicapped. The problem many times is the impossibility of recognizing a terminal emotional handicap.

As simple and self-evident as the following statements seem to be, I believe that in their true meaning is a real hope for recovery.

There are only two ways to handle grief, suppress it, or deal with it. I am sure all know which way is best and why.

The only way to get over grief is TO GO THROUGH IT.

We must WORK to overcome grief. Recognized for what it is, The Compassionate Friends meetings are a form of GRIEF WORK.

There is a choice involved in how long one grieves. In the end we must ourselves choose to recover.

The Compassionate Friends can play an important role in grief recovery.

The emotional massage and therapy we experience while talking and sharing with other bereaved parents is without reasonable alternative for our emotional recovery and continued well being.

As we grow and recover, it is important to remember that The Compassionate Friends is a self-help group of caring, sharing bereaved parents. If The Compassionate Friends is to be here to help other grieving parents at their time of need we must continue going to meetings to help after we no longer need to go to be helped. I have decided to repay the caring and sharing I received. I will continue going to meetings to give for the same length of time I want to receive. To me, it seems the only proper payment.

*E.G. Barnick,
TCF, Dallas, TX*

The Seven Stages of Grief

There is no right or wrong way to grieve. All your feelings are normal. It is helpful, however, to know that human grief is a process that often follows a healing pattern.

Shock is the first stage. It is accompanied by disbelief and numbness.

Denial follows quickly, crying "I don't believe it," or "It can't be."

Bargaining is your promise that "I'll be so very good that maybe I can wake up and find that it isn't so. I'll do all the right things if only...."

Guilt is painful and hard to deal with. This is when one says-over and over, "If only I had .. or If only I had not .." This is a normal feeling and ultimately it may be solved by stating, "I'm a human being and I gave the best and worst of me to my friend and what he or she does with that is his or her responsibility."

Anger. Anger is another big factor which seems to be necessary in order to face the reality of life and then to get beyond it. We must all heal in our own ways. Anger is a natural stage through which we must pass. Your anger at your deceased loved one may even make you feel guilty, or it may be because your own life continues where as your loved one's life is over.

Depression. Depression is a stage of grief that comes and goes. Knowing this, be prepared to give yourself time to heal. Resignation is a late stage. It comes when finally you accept the truth.

Acceptance and hope! Understand that you will never be the same but your life can go on to find meaning and purpose.

Circle

How do you bear it all?
The cry came from a mother
Whose son had died only weeks before.
We were in a circle, looking at her,
Looking around, looking away,
Tears in our hearts, in our eyes.
How do we bear it?
I don't know,
But the circle helps.

by Eva Lager, TCF/ Western Australia

*(Eva's daughter Milya
Claudia Lager died by suicide on
March 4 1990.)*



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Resources: Books

Below is a selection of books, divided into two categories. Because medical research shows that suicide is strongly linked to clinical depression and that depression has a strong genetic influence, one category includes books about depression, including bipolar mood disorder. These books will not only educate you about the illness that probably afflicted your child or sibling who died, but they will also give you important information for other family members, should they develop clinical depression.

The second category includes books from bereaved parents, siblings and others who share how they dealt with the death of their loved ones from suicide.

Books on Depression and Suicide

1. *On the Edge of Darkness*, by Kathy Cronkite (Doubleday, 1994)
2. *You Mean I Don't Have to Feel This Way?*, by Collette Dowling (Scribner's, 1991; Bantam, 1993)
3. *Mood Swing*, by Ronald Fieve, M.D. (Bantam, 1989)
4. *An Unquiet Mind*, by Kay Redfield Jamison (Alfred Knopf, 1995)
5. *Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide*, by Kay Redfield Jamison (Alfred Knopf, 1999)
6. *Touched with Fire*, by Kay Redfield Jamison (Simon & Schuster, 1993)
7. *Why Suicide?*, by Eric Marcus (HarperCollins, 1996)
8. *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, by Andrew Solomon (Scribner, 2001)
9. *Darkness Visible*, by William Styron (Random House, 1990)
10. *Suicide Why?: 85 Questions and Answers About Suicide*, by Adina Wroblewski (SAVE, 1994)

Books on Surviving the Suicide Death of a Loved One

1. *My Son, My Son ... A Guide to Healing After Death, Loss or Suicide*, by Iris Bolton (Bolton Press, 1983)
2. *Telling Secrets*, by Frederick Buechner (Harper, 1992)
3. *Stronger Than Death*, by Sue Chance, M.D. (Avon Books, 1994; Replica Books, 1997)
4. *Saying Olin to Say Goodbye*, by Donald Hackett (Old Cedar Publications, 1986)
5. *After A Suicide: Young People Speak Up*, by Susan Kuklin (Putnam Publishing Group, 1994)
6. *Knowing Why Changes Nothing*, by Eva Lager with Sascha Wagner (Options Publishing, Perth, Australia, 1997)
7. *Suicide of a Child*, by Adina Wroblewski (Centering Corporation, 1993)
8. *Suicide Survivors: A Guide for Those Left Behind*, by Adina Wroblewski (SAVE, 1994)

Books on Grief That Include Deaths by Suicide

9. *After the Death of a Child: Living With Loss Through the Years*, by Ann K. Finkbeiner (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)
10. *A Broken Heart Still Beats: After Your Child Dies*, by Anne McCracken and Mary Semel (Hazeldon, 1998; paperback, 2000)
11. *In the Midst of Winter*, by Mary Jane Moffat ((Vintage Books, 1982)
12. *The Worst Loss: How Families Heal from the Death of a Child*, by Barbara Rosof (Henry Holt, 1994)

I do not ask that you forget your dear departed. I want you to remember. I only ask that you remember more than the moment of death, more than the funeral, more than the house of mourning. Remember life! Remember the whole life, not the final page of it.

... Rabbi Maurice Davis, TCF, Baltimore, Maryland



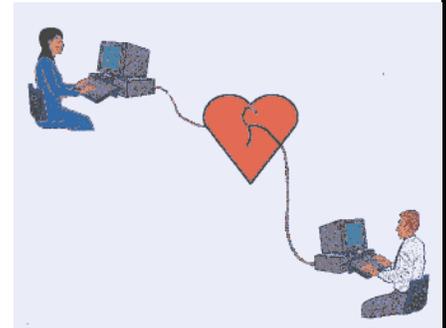
The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Cyberspace News

First of all visit TCF on the Net! At <http://www.compassionatefriends.org>
Dr. Mary A. Paulson PhD, a bereaved sibling, is a child and adolescent psychologist at Harding Hospital in Worthington, Ohio. She will answer your questions related to sibling loss, grief and recovery. E-mail your questions to: JEYY23A@prodigy.com

Ed & Joan Motuzas at: headly@comcast.net
Sally & Dave Migliaccio at: TLF070867@msn.com
Barbara & Mike Eisenberg at: Mikieis@att.net
Carol & Mike Mangino at: Manginom@sprynet.com
Gail & Chuck Lacks at: GAILSTORM2@aol.com
Teen Age Grief at: juliesplace.com
Rick Dugan at: Rick-Dugan@comcast.net
Carole Katz at: capekatz@comcast.net
Parents of Suicides website/memorial: www.parentsosuiicide.com
To subscribe to PS e-mail support group: www.onelist.com/subscribe/parentsosuiicide
Grieving Parents memorial website: www.angelfire.com/ab3/grievingparents/
To subscribe to Grieving Parents support group: www.onelist.com/subscribe/grievingparents
Sandy & Bernie Sanders at: Smiley8791@aol.com



Survivors Bill of Rights:

- I have the right to be free of guilt.
- I have the right not to feel responsible for the suicide death.
- I have the right to express my feelings and emotions, even if they do not seem acceptable, as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others.
- I have the right to have my questions answered honestly by authorities and family members.
- I have the right not to be deceived because others feel they can spare me further grief.
- I have the right to maintain a sense of hopefulness.
- I have the right to peace and dignity.
- I have the right to positive feelings about the one I lost through suicide, regardless of events prior to or at the time of the untimely death.
- I have the right to retain my individuality and not to be judged because of the suicide death.
- I have the right to seek counseling and support groups to enable me to explore my feelings honestly to further the acceptance process.
- I have the right to reach acceptance.
- I have the right to a new beginning.
- I have the right to be.

THE GRIEF AND THE MOURNING PROCESS

After a death by suicide, there is a need to understand *why*. You need to ask that question, but you may never know the answer. A combination of significant and contradictory factors seems to be present. One result is that a survivor often seems to be hapless, helpless, and hopeless.

HAPLESS! Some people who have self-destructive tendencies also appear to have a helpless quality about their lives. One thing after another goes wrong. Such persons may over-react in a negative way and, as a result, start to feel. .

HELPLESS!! - He or she doesn't know how to get back on track. If one's helplessness continues and deepens, that person may become..

HOPELESS!!! - And so the will to live diminishes and disappears.

Iris Bolton

From her book, My Son...My Son...

*By JoAnn Mecca
Reprinted from the website*



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



THOUGH WE MEET AS STRANGERS, BY OUR LOVE WE SHALL BE KNOWN

I agree that this is one of the worst things that can happen to you in your life. I know because my twenty-year-old son committed suicide. *You can survive it*, even though you may not think so now. Then you will know your own strength. When you've survived this, you can survive all life's tragedies.

You need to talk to each other about your loss and your pain. Talk about the good times you remember and the not-so-good. Keep talking and don't bottle up. All of your feelings are natural. Know this and believe it. Feelings of guilt and anger may be strong and are to be expected.

You may use this time to bring your family closer together or to tear you apart by blaming. *Nobody* is at fault. You may need to feel guilty for a while to eventually know that you are *not* responsible. Sometimes you have to go *through* a feeling to get *beyond* it. Facing death together can give you an appreciation of each other and of life that you never had before. Allow yourself to just *be* and to *be with each other*. There is no right or wrong to any of it.

There are no set rules to follow. Take the lead from your minister or the person making arrangements, but ask for anything you want or need, even if it seems foolish.

My personal faith is in a loving God who is with us through tragedy. I do not believe he caused it or that he allowed it. It just happened. I believe my healing will come through my faith, my family and friends. If your beliefs do not include the concept of God, your comfort and support may come mainly from family, friends and your own inner strength.

You will ask why a million times, and you need to ask the question. You may never know the complete answer of why, but it's important to struggle with the question. Then one day you will be able to let it go and not need to know anymore. Then you will be dealing with how to go on with your own lives. The meaning I have found in my own son's suicide is to realize that life is tenuous for us all, so I have the choice of making every minute count with my family from now on and valuing them and friends and life in a way I never did before.

It may be helpful to face the reality that suicide was an apparent solution to overwhelming problems for a member of your family. If you can talk openly with each other or a counselor about other solutions and alternatives to problem solving, this agony may never again touch your family.

Please allow your friends and family to take care of you. This helps you and helps them, too. You don't have to be strong. In fact, crying is natural and healing and keeps you from bottling up your feelings.

Know and expect guilt and anger to be natural and hard to deal with. It may be important for you to someday get angry at him/her. This was important for me to do, even though, at first, I could not get in touch with my anger at all. I finally gave myself permission to be angry at my son for giving up, for leaving me with such pain, for leaving my life, for not allowing me or others to help him, for his choice about his life, and for his lost future and mine with him. When my anger was expressed, I could then let it go, and the anger lost its destructive power in my life.



I struggled with guilt—what had I done or not done that I should have or should not have? I finally realized that I gave my son my humanness ... my positives and negatives. What he did with that was his responsibility ... not mine. I could give him total responsibility for his own actions. I could let the guilt and the anger go. I could experience a sense of relief for the end to his pain and suffering. A sense of peace.

In summary ... be with each other; keep talking to each other; talk about him or her (positive and negative memories); allow your friends to do things for you; make major decisions together; know you will all grieve differently and respect that; allow yourself to cry and release your feelings, and *know you can survive*.

My hope for you is that you will go through the mourning and grieving that is needed for emotional healing, and that you, too, will one day find renewed meaning in your own life and hope for the future.

Though we meet as strangers, by our love we will be known.

Iris Bolton
From her book, My Son...My Son...



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Life Can Be Good Again

by Don Hackett, TCF, Hingham Massachusetts

For nearly sixteen years, his voice has been silent. It is a span now nearly equal to the time it was heard. Never did I anticipate life without the sounds that marked his presence. Learning to survive that silence once seemed an impossible task, one so overwhelming I could find no hope or expectation of ever finding life once more.

He was our son, our only child. The tempo of his growing measured the cadence, the beat, for our own living. His passing left an existence without any value that I could immediately perceive. Ultimately, I came to recognize that I was wrong.

Life still had meaning, but it had fallen to me to find it, just as it had been in the years before his coming. Indeed, even as it had been throughout the time of his living, life still demanded my active participation, my own commitment to give it purpose and resolve.

Hindsight affords an ease in stating this realization that did not exist while struggling in the depths of bereavement. The steps taken to finally seize life again seem logical and ordered while intellectualizing the process but I know that this is much easier to write than it was to experience.

I confess, with both sorrow and gladness, that I can no longer summon the full measure of those savage feelings and the unremitting pain that engulfed me in those early years. Working through them was the most demanding challenge of my life, enacting tolls in physical health perhaps even greater than the long-term effects on mind and emotion.

Today, however, I can reflect with gratitude upon a decade of mastery over the sadness. Control of my thoughts returned to me, and I know freedom from the utter devastation of those early years. Looking back reveals essential turning points on the road to healing. Some would seem to generalize easily for anyone. Others seem to respond to personal strengths and weaknesses more particular to an individual. These points included:

- Self forgiveness for the many deficiencies found within on the endless soul journey that is our lot in the wake of our child's death.
- Forgiveness of others, relatives, friends and associates, who are less affected than are we, who seem unable to help us in our time of deep trouble and need.
- The accepting, at last, of the finality of our loss, and that we must gradually unleash ourselves from our former lives and structure anew.

Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends, surviving siblings, our love for whom seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief. Find ways to give expression to our need to somehow memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships, or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention. A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives. Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us tomorrow with hope.

No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extent, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today. The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition.

Olin is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me. No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life.

Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt-producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Olin both behind me in time, but with me internally.

Is this not our goal, to heal, to find the strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today.

"Olin is with me still, but now of the heart and memory. No matter what my span of days, each moment will yield its love for him. He will stand waiting on the other shore. When the day is over, and life gives up the mortal for the eternal, there will I find him, with laughter in the air, joy in the moment, and with love in the heart."



by Don Hackett, writing of his son Olin in his book, *Saying Olin, To Say Goodbye*. Olin died by suicide on July 6, 1982.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



HOLIDAY SUGGESTIONS

The holidays are difficult for all who have lost a loved one to suicide, but especially for the survivor who is newly bereaved. We may remember happier holidays spent with all family members present. As the years go by the sadness becomes less overwhelming but it lingers. Usually, there is joy to be found but one must make a conscious effort to find it. Most survivors have found it helps to have a holiday plan and to change some of the family traditions. Here are some suggestions from experienced survivors who found them helpful.

- Take care of yourself, eat right; schedule some time for exercise and get plenty of sleep.
- Do your holiday shopping early to eliminate unnecessary stress.
- Decide what you can handle comfortably and let those needs be known to family, friends and relatives.
- If you find things aren't going well, set limitations and do only the things that are most important to you.
- Plan your holidays ahead of time. Having a schedule of known activities relieves some of the tension.
- Don't hesitate to make changes in your holiday traditions; it can make things less painful.
- Start a new tradition - one as simple as discarding an old recipe and trying a new one, changing the time you open your presents, time of the holiday meal, etc.
- Plan to be with people you enjoy.
- Buy yourself something special.
- If you feel the need to cry, remember tears are an honest expression of love and emotion.
- Some have found comfort in spending the holidays away from home.
- If the thought of sending holiday cards is too painful, give yourself permission not to send them.
- If you feel uncomfortable about one Christmas stocking being missing, don't hang any or substitute something else to fill.
- Many have found comfort in doing something for others; give a gift in memory of your loved one to your favorite charity, invite a senior citizen, foreign student or other guest to share your festivities, etc.

- Include the deceased in your conversations with family and friends when you discuss past holidays. Some survivors have experienced disappointment when their loved one was excluded from holiday conversations. Having a discussion with your family beforehand helps to avoid this situation and additional grief.

*Reprinted from Survivors After Suicide
Newsletter, Los Angeles, CA.*

September 14, 1999

How much I have learned since that horrendous day.
I've learned that I'm not alone in my grief,
That others have suffered, are suffering and will suffer
The tremendous loss of losing someone they love to
suicide.

Two years later I also learned how grief can destroy
When your father, who couldn't deal with his grief,
Decided to end his pain and suffering too.

I've learned I wasn't as guilty as I had thought at first,
That your decision was yours alone,
That once made nobody could change it.
And I've learned to stop asking the "Why?" question
—That question to which only you have the answer.
Some people said that I'd get over losing you in a
year.

After that first round of holidays, birthdays, etc. I'd be
fine.

Guess what — I've learned just how wrong they were.
It's now the 10th year — the 10th year of holidays,
birthdays, etc.

Certainly it's not as heart-wrenching as the first year
or even the 5th.

But I'm still not over losing you and I'm still not
"fine."

And I doubt that I'll ever get over losing you, that I'll
ever be "fine."

I'm certainly not the same person I was before this all
began.

I guess I've reached a "new normal" though and I'm
going on with life.

Even though it's been the most difficult thing I've
ever had to endure,

At least now I'm strong enough to help those who
follow on this path.

But, oh, how I'd give up all I've learned for just an-
other hour with you.

**by Karen C. Kimball,
Hingham, Massachusetts**



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Resources: Organizations and Internet Links

This page contains a list of selected organizations that have information about suicide and for survivors of suicide. (i.e., those of us who have had a loved one die by suicide). There are more links on the various websites.

American Association of
Suicidology
4201 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 408
Washington, DC 20008
Voice: (202) 237-2280
Fax: (202) 237-2282
E-mail: ajkulp@suicidology.org
Website: <http://www.suicidology.org/>

AAS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the understanding and prevention of suicide. The website is a resource for anyone concerned about suicide, including AAS members, suicide researchers, therapists, prevention specialists, survivors of suicide, and people who are themselves in crisis.

American Foundation for
Suicide Prevention
120 Wall Street, 22nd Floor
New York, NY 10005
Fax: (212) 363-6237
Toll free: (888) 333-2377
Phone: (212) 363-3500
E-mail: inquiry@afsp.org
Website: <http://www.afsp.org/>

Dedicated to advancing knowledge of suicide and how to prevent it. Includes suicide facts, support information and research articles.

Suicide Prevention Advocacy
Network (SPAN)
5034 Odins Way
Marietta, GA 30068
Phone: 1(888) 649-1366
Fax: (770) 642-1419
E-mail: act@spanusa.org
Website: <http://www.spanusa.org/>

SPAN is a non-profit national organization that links the energy of those bereaved by suicide with the expertise of leaders in science, business, government and public service to achieve the goal of significantly reducing the national rate of suicide by the year 2010.

Suicide Awareness \ Voices of
Education (SA\VE)
7317 Cahill Road, Suite 207
Minneapolis, MN 55439-0507
Phone: (952) 946-7998
Toll Free: (888) 51 1-SAVE
E-mail: save@wintemet.com
Website: <http://www.save.org/>

The mission of SAVE is to educate about suicide prevention and to speak for suicide survivors. Includes answers to frequently asked questions about suicide and depression, a suggested reading list and links.

Newsletters
Bipolar Network News
National Institutes of Mental Health
10 Center Drive MSC 1272
Bldg. 10, Room 3N212
Bethesda, MD 20892-1272
Phone: (800) 518-7326
Fax: (301) 402-0052
Website <http://www.bipolarnetwork.org/>

Friends For Survival, Inc.
P.O. Box 214463
Sacramento, CA 95821
Phone: (916) 392-0664
Website: <http://www.friendsforsurvival.org/>

Suicide Bereavement Support
SW Washington and NW Oregon
Metanoia Peace Community, United
Methodist Church
2116 NE 18th Street
Portland, OR 97212
Phone: (503) 699-8103

Loving Outreach to Survivors of Suicide (LOSS)
Catholic Charities LOSS Program
126 N. Desplaines Avenue
Chicago, IL 60661-2357
Phone: (312) 655-7283

Two years ago, TCF officially adopted the terms "died by suicide" or "died of suicide" to replace the commonly used "committed suicide" or "completed suicide" language. In its press release encouraging other organizations to adopt the new language, TCF noted that "... many suicide deaths are the result of brain disorders or biochemical illnesses such as clinical depression, but the stigma associated with suicide often forces family members to choose between secrecy about the death and social isolation. Their hesitancy to seek the support of the community increases their pain and makes their healing more difficult. Families who have had a child die by suicide are helped in their grief by the use of nonjudgmental language."



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Suicide: How Do We Say It?

From the moment we learned of our daughter's death, I knew that the word "suicide" had the power to erase her life while emblazoning her death in neon letters in the minds of her friends and colleagues. During the unremitting misery of those early days, I even toyed with the idea of telling no one she was gone, willing her to stay alive in the thoughts of those who knew her, forgetting that I'd already notified our family and closest friends. It was a fairy tale wish I contrived as a way of allowing myself a momentary escape from the unthinkable reality of her death. If her death were never acknowledged, would she still be here?

My fantasy vanished in the cold light of the days that followed. I knew that we could never dishonor Rhonda's memory by concealing her suicide. I wrote a letter to friends and relatives, informing them of the events leading up to her death. I hoped my letter would quell the inevitable whispers by openly acknowledging her depression and her decision to end her own life. I implored them to speak often and openly about her to us; to do otherwise would deny her existence.

I never intended to embark on a campaign to confront, let alone eradicate, the stigma of suicide. What mattered most was that we who loved Rhonda must not let the circumstances of her death diminish her memory or her accomplishments. I explained that she had "taken her own life" or that "she died of suicide." An expression I refused to use then and refuse to use to this day, is the despicable "committed suicide," with its implications of criminality. Historically, that term was an instrument of retaliation against the survivors, and it has no place in today's enlightened society.

Many people prefer to say, "completed suicide," but as a parent who witnessed my child's 20-year struggle against the demons of clinical depression, I don't care much for that, either. "Died of suicide" or "died by suicide" are accurate, emotionally-neutral ways to explain my child's death.

My first encounter with suicide occurred many years ago when my dentist, a gentle family man in his mid 30s, took his own life. Since that time, I have known neighbors, relatives, friends and other hardworking, highly respected individuals who died this way. I've facilitated meetings in which grieving parents declined to speak about their children because they couldn't handle the group's reactions to the dreaded "s" word. I've known parents who never returned to a chapter meeting because of negative comments about the way that their child died.

Rhonda was a gifted scholar, writer and archaeologist who, like my mother, suffered from adult-onset manic depression (also called bipolar disorder). She made a lasting contribution in her field, and a wonderful tribute to her life and her work appeared in *American Antiquity, Journal of the Society for American Archaeology* (October, 1994).

Both my daughter and my mother suffered tremendously in their struggles to conquer and conceal their illness. Neither of them won that battle, but my mother responded to medications that minimized the highs and lows, and she died of cancer at 87. Sadly, doctors never discovered a magic formula that could offer Rhonda the same relief. She ended her own life at age 36, after a year of severe depression that was triggered by life stresses beyond her control. I saw her battle firsthand, and I witnessed her valiant struggle to survive. She wanted desperately to live; she died because she thought she had no alternative.

In his revealing book, *Telling Secrets*, the great theologian Frederick Buechner describes his father's suicide, which occurred when Buechner was just a boy. The conspiracy of silence that was imposed on Buechner and his brother had a profound effect on their development and their relationships with other family members. "We are as sick as our secrets," he concludes.

We whose children have taken their own lives must do all that we can to help eradicate the secrecy and stigma that surround their deaths. If we allow these to persist, we allow their lives to be diminished. We owe our children more than that.

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TCF, Sugar land, TX

The Golden Gate Bridge: Still Beautiful

On May 23rd, 1995 my son jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge (in San Francisco). Tempting as it is to believe he'd still be alive had there been a barrier, I think it would be naive. In my despair I wanted to blame the psychiatrist who refused to see him because he'd missed some appointments, the girlfriend who'd ended their relationship just two days prior to his jump, the crisis center at the hospital where he'd gone for help and who could have kept him had they read the signs right, but didn't; myself, (especially myself), for flawed parenting. But never did I blame the bridge! In the end it was his decision. In his farewell note, he said he was going to electrocute himself. What made him change his mind? I don't know, but I believe it was the deed, not the method, that he was determined to execute. People who really want to die find a way. So while a barrier would deter suicides on the bridge, it would hardly deter suicides. Should we eliminate tall buildings, parking structures, automobile exhaust pipes, ropes?

In spite of very sad memories, I still appreciate the beauty of the bridge. People from all over the world enjoy the vistas from this compelling structure. Is it fair to impair the visibility in a futile effort to control deaths from the bridge? The bridge is for the living, too.

Carol Sheldon
TCF, Marin County, California



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



When Someone Takes His Own Life by Norman Vincent Peale

In many ways, this seems the most tragic form of death. Certainly it can entail more shock and grief for those who are left behind than any other. And often the stigma of suicide is what rests most heavily on those left behind

And my heart goes out to those who are left behind, because I know that they suffer terribly. Children in particular are left under a cloud of differentness all the more terrifying because it can never be fully explained or lifted. The immediate family of the victim is left wide open to tidal waves of guilt: "What did I fail to do that I should have done? What did I do that was wrong?" To such grieving persons I can only say, "Lift up your heads and your hearts. Surely you did your best. And surely the loved one who is gone did his best, for as long as he could. Remember, now, that his battles and torments are over. Do not judge him, and do not presume to fathom the mind of God where this one of His child is concerned."

A few years ago, when a young man died by his own hand, a service for him was conducted by his pastor, the Rev. Weston Stevens. What he said that day expresses far more eloquently than I can, the message that I'm trying to convey. Here are some of his words:

"Our friend died on his own battlefield. He was killed in action fighting a civil war. He fought against adversaries that were as real to him as his casket is real to us. They were powerful adversaries. They took toll of his energies and endurance. They exhausted the last vestiges of his courage and his strength. At last these adversaries overwhelmed him. And it appeared that he had lost the war. But did he? I see a host of victories that he has won!

"For one thing, he has won our admiration, because even if he lost the war, we give him credit for his bravery on the battlefield. And we give him credit for the courage and pride and hope that he used as his weapons as long as he could. We shall remember not his death, but his daily victories gained through his kindnesses and thoughtfulness, through his love for family and friends, for animals and books and music, for all things beautiful, lovely and honorable. We shall remember not his last day of defeat, but we shall remember the many days that he was victorious over overwhelming odds. We shall remember not the years we thought he had left, but the intensity with which he lived the years that he had. Only God knows what this child of His suffered in the silent skirmishes that took place in his soul. But our consolation is that God does know, and understands."

THE GRIEF OF CHILDREN

When children experience the death of a loved one they grieve just as adults do. They may not be able to verbalize their grief. They may repress their feelings or express them through their behavior. They may seem not to be affected. But, they are grieving, often very deeply.

As parents or teachers we often want to protect children from the pain of grief. If we see ourselves having difficulty dealing with the death, we wonder how a young child could possibly cope with it. So we exclude children. We isolate them. We leave them on their own to answer their questions, to seek out the meaning of the death. As a result, many children facing such a significant loss feel bewildered, abandoned, and all alone.

The way children learn to respond to death and loss early in life affects their reactions to future losses. If we, as adults, take the time to share with children their feelings when a pet dies, or to discuss the deaths they experience through books and television, we are helping to prepare them to handle the death of a significant person when it does occur.

HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH DEATH

Be direct, simple and honest. Explain truthfully what happened.

Encourage the child to express feelings openly. Crying is normal and helpful.

Accept the emotions and reactions the child expresses.

Don't tell the child how he should or should not feel.

Offer warmth and your physical presence and affection.

Share your feelings with the child. Allow the child to comfort you.

Be patient. Know that children need to hear "the story" and to ask the same questions again and again.

Reassure the child that death is not contagious, that the death of one person does not mean the child or other loved ones will soon die.

Maintain order, stability and security in the child's life.

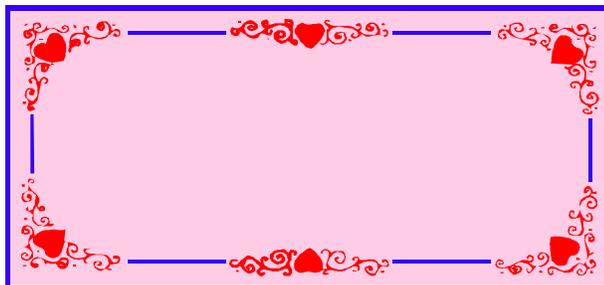
Listen to what the child is telling or asking you. Then respond according to the child's needs.

Allow the child to make some decisions about participation in family rituals (visitation, the funeral, socializing after the funeral). Be sure to explain in advance what will happen.

With your loving and patient concern the child will be better able to work through the grief process and to adjust to life without the deceased.

*Boulder County Hospice
Boulder, Colorado*

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*This newsletter is printed
through the generosity of
Ridgewood Printing
Milford, Mass.*

TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third, or fourth meeting might be the time you will find the right person - or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work.



TO OUR OLD MEMBERS

*We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. Each meeting we have new parents. **THINK BACK...**what would it have been like for you if there had not been any “oldies” to welcome you, share your grief, and encourage you? It was from them you heard, “your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer.”*