



NOVEMBER and DECEMBER 2013



Seattle-King County Chapter P.O. Box 66896 Seattle, WA 98166 206-241-1139

PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS



"When we are in the midst of grief, the last thing we may want to think about is the holidays. We may have little desire to participate. We may simply refuse to make plans, wishing the holidays would quickly, if not painlessly, pass."



The holidays are tough when we are grieving a loss. Holidays are centering moments in our lives, full of memories. We remember the Thanksgiving the oven broke down, the Chanukah or Christmas gifts we received. It is very easy for our longing for someone we miss to become intense.

There are other reasons the holidays can be tough. We often see reminders – the perfect gift or a holiday card addressed to the person who died. They are stressful and busy times. This stress is difficult to bear when coping with grief. We might feel so out of step with the season. Our sadness seems magnified against the joy of others. Finally, in the midst of winter, we may feel more isolated and alone, the deepening darkness a reflection of our inner being.

That is why it is essential to plan. We need not spend a great deal of time thinking of holiday menus or planning the perfect gift or care. I am speaking of something more important – planning how to get through the holidays.

The danger is drift. It is easy in the stressful times of the holidays to surrender our decision making to well-meaning others, like the sister-in-law who will not take no for an answer. The result is that we find ourselves drifting into activities that are tiring, painful, or that don't meet our needs.

The first thing we need to do is to **choose**. What activities do we really want to do? What activities do we need to do? What doesn't need to be done this year? We might decide to not send cards or host a dinner.

As for the activities we choose, we must find the best way to do them, consistent with our own needs. For example, if we decide to give gifts, we might consider how we wish to do this. Do we simply send a check, shop from the Internet or a catalog, or shop with a friend?

With whom do we wish to spend the holidays? Who can be present with us as we grieve? Who will understand that we may not be our usual selves?

Sometimes it is a choice not to make a choice. Grief is often a roller-coaster experience, full of ups and downs. Grace knew that. So she decided that she would keep her options open until that very morning. She knew she would spend some time with her in-laws, but would wait until that day to see where she was on that roller coaster before committing to a particular schedule. We need to remember to remain flexible. For Tom, he decided to take his own car so he could leave when he was ready, rather than be obligated to wait for others.

We need, too, to recognize the individuality of grief. For some of us, the holidays are difficult and stressful. There may be others of us who welcome the diversion and find comfort in the bustle of activity. Still others of us might find ourselves torn between both feelings. It is the range of reactions that makes our grief unique.

Once we have made our choices, we should **communicate** those decisions to others. Part of that communication is listening to others. That may add a third "C" to our holiday plans – **compromise**.

The holidays are approaching so we need to plan. But we may want to remember this recipe –

Choose, Communicate and Compromise.



By Kenneth J. Doka, PhD, MDiv, Sr. Consultant to HFA; professor of gerontology at the College of New Rochelle in New York.



The Compassionate Friends

Seattle-King County Chapter



The Compassionate Friends (TCF) is a *non-profit mutual assistance, self-help* organization offering *friendship, understanding, and hope* to bereaved parents and families. Anyone who has experienced the death of a child of any age, from any cause is welcome. Our meetings provide an opportunity to talk about their child and about their feelings as they go through the grieving process. There is no religious affiliation. There are no membership dues. The purpose of this support group is not to focus on the cause of death or the age of the child, but to support bereaved parents, grandparents and adult siblings in the positive resolution of the grief feelings and issues that revolve around the death of their loved one and support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to the first meeting is the hardest, 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. At the next meeting you may find just the right person or just the right words that will help you in your grief work. Try to attend three times before deciding if TCF is right for you.

TO OUR MEMBERS WHO ARE FURTHER DOWN THE "GRIEF ROAD"

We need your encouragement and your support. Each meeting we have new parents. THINK BACK – what would it have been like for you at your first meeting if there had not been any TCF 'veterans' to welcome you, share your grief, encourage you and tell you, "your pain will not always be this bad, it really does get better!"

INFORMATION REGARDING OUR MEETINGS

PLEASE come to a meeting. We are here to discuss whatever is on your mind. This is YOUR group and we are here for each other. You do not have to talk at meetings. We welcome your participation in our group, but it is not a requirement. Coming to listen to the other members is okay, too. Our meetings are open to parents, grandparents, adult siblings, or other adult family members.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

This group belongs to you and cannot survive without assistance. Areas of help needed are refreshments, setting up before a meeting, being a phone friend for those who may be having a particularly difficult day, help with the newsletter, send thank-you notes, become a facilitator, volunteer to help with Chapter activities or serve on the steering committee.

Part of getting better, is being there to assist others, too, through this journey.

If you'd like to help, please contact us.

Chapter Co-Leaders: Mike McLeod: 206-369-7366 and Marge Tomlinson: tcfmarge@aol.com



KEEPING IN TOUCH




Seattle-King County Chapter **Phone: 206-241-1139** (TCF Line)

Seattle-King County Chapter **Mailing Address: P. O. Box 66896 Seattle, WA 98166-0896**

Seattle-King County Chapter **Website: www.tcfseattle.org**

Seattle-King County Chapter **Facebook: The Compassionate Friends, Seattle King County Chapter**

 **Phone Support:** Having a rough moment? Need someone to talk to? Call Robyn at 360-259-8006 ♥

Western Washington Regional Coordinator: position vacant

TCF National Office Phone: 877-969-0010

TCF National Mailing Address: P. O. Box 3696 Oak Brook, IL 60522-3696

TCF National Website: www.compassionatefriends.org (website has link to Facebook)

TCF Online Support - Please visit the National website to get the session schedule for the following groups:

- ♥ Parents/Grandparents/Siblings
- ♥ No Surviving Children
- ♥ Bereaved Less than Two Years
- ♥ Pregnancy / Infant Loss
- ♥ Survivors of Suicide
- ♥ Bereaved More than Two Years

TCF National Magazine 'We Need Not Walk Alone' Available Free Online!

To sign up for a free electronic version of TCF's **We Need Not Walk Alone** magazine, go to TCF's national website at www.compassionatefriends.org and click on "Sign up for National Publications" at the top of the Home (or any inside) page. Fill out the information and when each issue of the magazine is published, the National Office will send you a special link so you can be among the first to read its great content. It can be read online or downloaded to your computer for personal use. When you sign up for *We Need Not Walk Alone*, you also have the opportunity to sign up to receive the monthly national e-newsletter which provides information about what is currently happening within the organization.



Our Chapter's Sharing Group Location:

FEDERAL WAY

~2nd Wednesday evening of each month~

Our Upcoming Meetings:

**November 13, December 11, January 8,
February 12, March 12, April 9, May 14**

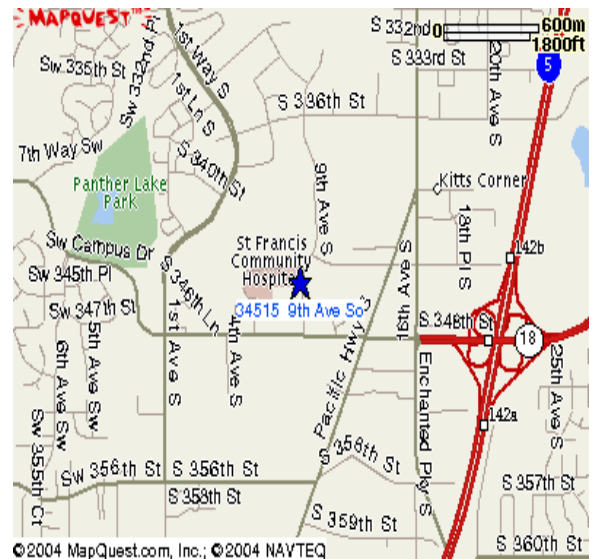
6:30pm – 8:30pm

St. Francis Hospital

34515 9th Ave. So.

Federal Way, WA 98003

Ask at the information desk in the main lobby for
directions to the meeting room.



Books on Grief Available

We have quite a large selection of grief books at our monthly meetings. We invite you to look over the books from our library. We hope you can find something that may help you and your family. If you have a book you would like to donate and share with other bereaved parents, please bring it with you to the meeting.

Birthday Table



In the month of your child's birthday, a Birthday Table is provided where you can share photos, mementos, your child's favorite snack, a birthday cake, a bouquet of flowers – anything you'd like to bring to share. We want to know your child better, so please take advantage of this opportunity to celebrate the wonderful day of your child's birth and for us to become better acquainted.

THANKSGIVING THOUGHTS

Sue Anderson, TCF, Seattle, WA



If your thoughts are turning to the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday, and your stomach turns...
...if you are cynically wondering just what there is to be "thankful" for...
...if you are asking yourself how can I be around family when my family is not complete...
...if you are questioning how you are going to listen to idle chatter about wallpaper and earrings when you know these things don't matter anymore...

...perhaps the following ideas sent in by other bereaved parents might be of some help.

- One family puts an empty place at the table with a beautiful red rose on the plate. Before dinner the whole family stands and drinks a toast to the brother who shared their life.
- A couple who has no other children invites people from work or the neighborhood who also have no family in the area to share the day.
- A young mother places a picture of her baby on the table of her mother's home and when everyone is seated she lights a candle and reads a poem.
- Going to the ocean ... and only the immediate family is another person's way of handling the day.
- Another mother takes a plateful of Thanksgiving dinner to the cemetery for her son.
- One family had energy enough to work in the mission downtown serving dinner to the homeless.

So often, family members don't know what to do so they just do nothing. Their non-action translates into rejection and pain for us. If you can, ask for what you need, request your family to talk about your child, to let you stay home or leave early. If you need it, you have my permission to do whatever you need to do to get through the holiday as intact as possible. Be kind to yourself. ♥

Life will not go on in the same way without your child. If it were the same, we could only conclude that child's life meant nothing, made no contribution. The fact that your child left behind a place that cannot be filled is a high tribute to the uniqueness of your child. ♥

AS THE HOLIDAYS APPROACH

By Jackie Wesley

TCF, East Central Indiana and Miami-Whitewater Chapters

When the holidays are fast approaching, we who are bereaved always have mixed emotions about having a nice holiday when our child or loved one is no longer with us. We wonder if we will ever be as happy and if we can ever again celebrate the holidays or any meaningful family occasion, especially the first birthday, first Thanksgiving, or first Christmas since our loss. We try to look ahead to how we are going to feel when the time arrives, but it is usually not as hard as we had anticipated. Still, the occasion may not be as enjoyable as we'd like it to be or as we remember it from the past.

I would like to offer a few ideas for what we can do to make our holidays a little better. Consider buying gifts for less fortunate children, adopting a child/family at Christmas time, or inviting a lonely person to share your holiday meal. Make your child's favorite foods and discuss your loved one as you share the meal. Some people like to volunteer to serve holiday dinners for the homeless. Some bereaved parents want to visit familiar places their child loved to go, while others want to travel where their child had never been.

Several of our Compassionate Friends members put a small Christmas tree at the cemetery and decorate the graves with Christmas flowers and/or a grave blanket. Making a grave blanket is very fulfilling; we did that for 10 years after our daughter Teresa died. Attending a Candlelight program is a wonderful way to honor your child or loved one.

These suggestions are things we feel we can still do for our child, but they are not reserved for bereaved parents only. All of them can be done for any member of a family or a friend who has died. After someone dies we must keep going and doing things that lift us up. We can't always try to please any people who feel we should act in a certain manner.

10 Tips for Living with the Holidays this Year

By Tom Zuba

1. Remind yourself that you will survive. You will.
2. Think about what will bring you the most peace this holiday season.
 - Keeping all traditions intact?
 - Tweaking some traditions a bit and adding new ones?
 - Throwing out all the old traditions and starting new ones?
 - Flying to the Caribbean and completely skipping the holidays this year? It's okay to do that.
3. Don't expect anyone to mention your child by name. Believe it or not, that's YOUR job. People will look to you to determine whether or not it's safe to talk about the person that died. A few subtle ways to do that:
 - Serve/bring your child's favorite dish to the holiday get-together – talk about it!
 - Bring a favorite picture – pass it around. Work it into the dining table centerpiece.
 - Bring a favorite memento – a book, a poem, a toy, a video, an article of clothing - share it after dinner.
 - Have your child's favorite music playing in the background – tell the story!
4. Plan a special evening for close family and friends when you REMEMBER. Ask everyone to bring a favorite photo and write down a special memory. Set time aside to sit in a circle and share the photos and memories.
5. Remember that it's okay-it's even healthy-to cry.
6. It's okay to stay in bed...you will get out, when you are ready and able.
7. It's also okay to smile or even laugh, a bit. You are not being disloyal.
8. Buy yourself a gift. Wrap it. Write a note – to you – from your beloved child.
9. Buy someone less fortunate than you a gift.
10. Light a candle.

Used with permission from the author, Tom Zuba, twice bereaved parent, author, speaker, and workshop presenter. www.tomzuba.com

I know for certain that we never lose the people we love, even to death. They continue to participate in every act, thought and decision we make. Their love leaves an indelible imprint in our memories. We find comfort in knowing that our lives have been enriched by having shared their love. ~ Leo Buscaglia



**Your absence has gone through me like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color.** ~ w.s. merwin



THANKSGIVING OF LIFE

Marcia F. Alig

Only a month after Daniel's death, Thanksgiving arrived full of symbols of plentiful harvest and thankfulness while we felt bereft of everything. We fled to Maryland. There, among the many around my sister's table, Daniel's empty place stood out less starkly than at home. Love and family pressed around to hold back the despair and the loneliness. Though we could not feel the spirit of Thanksgiving, we did appreciate the support and caring of our family. We marveled that any positive feelings were able to emerge.

Upon our return to New Jersey, we were greeted by a neighbor flushed with surprise and excitement. During our absence Daniel's dog, Puffy, had given birth to three puppies, in her powder room! Our caring neighbor served as mid-wife throughout the night of their birth, alternately crying for the loss of Daniel and laughing with the joy of new life.

That Thanksgiving, eleven years ago, held many special messages for us. Messages of love, family, neighbors, and giving. Greatest of all was the message of life. Though we went away, we could not flee the holiday nor the pain of separation; we could not run from life. It was waiting for us at my sister's. It was waiting for us upon our return.

Yet, a long time passed before we could accept living again. Puffy's puppies, however, were the beginning. As they nibbled our fingers or wet the carpet, they caused us to care about their antics. Their damp noses and velvet ears helped us to interact with the community through searching for their adoptive families. We also practiced letting go as each puppy left.

For us, holidays are again happy occasions for the same reason they were originally difficult. Holidays are days set aside for love, togetherness, sharing, and families. The death of a child turns those wonderful aspects of holidays into pain. What we discovered that Thanksgiving long ago is that even with the pain comes the beginning of healing from the love, togetherness, sharing, and families that holidays include. So, change your routine or surroundings this Thanksgiving, but do not try to flee from life. Life is the pathway to recovery. Allow yourself the reassurance of feeling life's healing power this holiday. Happy Thanksgiving!



RECIPE FOR RECOVERY

Cynthia Keller, TCF, Cincinnati, OH



As many of us go about preparing our Thanksgiving dinners, don't we wish we had a "Recipe for Recovery?" "Just add a cup of boiling water, stir well and drink" and our grieving would be over. Our society seems to crave instant answers, but bereavement is a long, slow process and there are no easy solutions. Yet, I couldn't help imagining what I would put in my own "recipe for recovery."

- Start with one cup of the Milk of Human Kindness – all those dear friends who did not turn away from me when they heard of my son's death but helped in so many practical, caring ways to make the first months easier.
- Add several "Good Eggs" – helpful professionals like my minister, the counselor who suggested TCF, and the young funeral director couple who organized the TCF chapter I attended in northern New York.
- Throw in a few heaping teaspoons of reading materials – books and pamphlets from the TCF library that started my thoughts going in a positive direction.
- Add "The Salt of the Earth" – wonderful new friends I met through TCF and the other support groups. Maybe we should call them "The Cream of the Crop" because eventually they rise to the top!
- Sprinkle liberally with tears – because it's okay to cry – and generously with laughter – because we can learn to smile again.
- Bake in a warm oven of "Tender Loving Care."

Be sure to make enough to share with others and freeze some for later.

(Dear Reader – Please remember that there is no perfect recipe for grieving. Each of us will grieve in our own way based on our own personal history and life experiences. Each of us will experience the various aspects of grief in our own unique way. We need to give ourselves permission to spend as much time as we need to explore those particular feelings. Grief has similarities for each of us but the process is uniquely our own to experience. Be kind to yourself. – Editor - MT)

You can't rush grief. It has its own timetable. All you can do is make sure there are lots of soft places around -- beds, pillows, arms, laps. ~ Patti Davis



When Grief during the Holidays is New

By Pat Schwiebert, R.N.

pat@tearsoup.com



As we officially enter the holiday season those who grieve enter into a quagmire of emotions.

Is it okay to experience joy when your loved one is dead?

Can you be grateful for the time you had with your loved one while being overwhelmed with missing that person?

Will you give yourself permission to join in the festivities of the season or not gather with family and friends depending on how you feel in the moment?

For those in their first season, you may be surprised at how challenging this time of year may be. Friends and family may or may not be aware of what this may be like for you. Because holidays are more intense, and hold more expectations than other times in the year, they are a set-up for those who grieve. Holidays tend to be family time. You would think it should mean that family will be around supporting each other and remembering holidays past and those no longer present. Some will do it well. Others will deny there's someone missing, while the atmosphere will be like there is an elephant in the room, but everybody's pretending that nothing special is going on.

People will mean well. But their tendency may be to want to fix you. They want the old you back. They want you to be happy in order to reduce their discomfort. But there is no fixing a broken heart. Your heart will never again be without blemish. The scar from your sorrow will remain, and the healing that you will go through will make you a different person. That's not a bad thing. But it's helpful to know that part of you will be changing.

To simplify the holidays it may be helpful to assess just what is important to you. Here are a few questions to ask yourself about the holidays:

1. What kind of celebration do I want to have this year?
2. Do I really have to put up all those decorations?
3. Can meals be more simply prepared and be just as filling with a few less calories?
4. Who is it important for me to see and visit with during the holidays?
5. Who makes the rules about who I must give presents to and how much I must spend?
6. Must I attend every event that I am invited to during the holiday season?
7. Can I give myself permission to create some new traditions?
8. Can I believe that people are coming to visit me and that they are not there to check on my housecleaning abilities or lack thereof?
9. Can I be kind to myself and plan some quiet times during the holidays to provide myself with enough rest?
10. What does this time of year mean to me personally and how do I wish to celebrate it. For example, will I attend or not attend church services, etc.?
11. What traditions do I want to hold onto and which are important to others in my family?
12. Am I willing to let others know what will help me feel safe at gatherings and to ask what their needs may be?
13. What rituals could I create around the holidays to help me remember my loved one?

There is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holidays. Set out with the intention to do the best you can, given the circumstances. Whether you stick to old family traditions or change the pattern, it's all OK. You will not be able to please everyone. Next year you may have more energy and more interest in participating in holiday routines than you do now. This year you may have to figure out how to get through the season and not set yourself up for what you're not ready for. Try to recognize that the holiday is just another day of the year filled with all sorts of activities, not just dreaded memories.

The staff at Grief Watch hope for a soft holiday season for you... one that allows you to just be in the moment, appreciating memories of holidays past, and being grateful for those who can hope for you when you yourself can't experience hope.

Reprinted with permission from Grief Watch. <http://www.griefwatch.com>

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The Compassionate Friends
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Light a candle for all children who have died

Worldwide Candle Lighting®

... that their light may always shine.

Sunday, December 8, 2013
7 PM Around the Globe

Worldwide Candle Lighting
Sunday, December 8, 2013 @ 7pm
Local Time Around the Globe

It takes only you and one candle to join hearts with the world!

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor and remember children who have died at any age from any cause. Candles are lit at 7 p.m. local time creating a 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone in honor of all the children whose memories we treasure in our hearts. The virtual wave of light of hundreds of thousands of persons commemorates and honors children in a way that transcends all ethnic, cultural, religious, and political boundaries.

On Sunday, December 8, 2013, hundreds of formal community candle lighting ceremonies will be held in parks, churches, and other public places by TCF chapters, allied organizations, and informal groups. Thousands of informal candle lightings are

conducted in homes as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

Visit The Compassionate Friends national website at www.compassionatefriends.org for location information about the Worldwide Candle Lighting and memorial services. A special remembrance book will be available the day of the candle lighting on the TCF national website and all are welcome to post a message of remembrance. Thousands of messages are received and posted from every U.S. state, Washington D.C., every territory, as well as dozens of other countries.

We do this . . . that their light may always shine!

~ Check the TCF Nat'l website OFTEN as candlelighting events are added until the day of the event. ~