



The Compassionate Friends, Queensland Inc.

Grief Support for Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings

Newsletter (Extracts) Dec 2009 - Jan 2010



A Letter to My Family and Friends:

Thank you for not expecting too much from me this holiday season. It will be our first Christmas without our child and I have all I can do coping with the "spirit of the holiday" on the radio, TV, in the newspapers and stores. We do not feel joyous and trying to pretend this Christmas is going to be like the last will be impossible because we are missing one.

Our family traditions will be too painful for us to continue this year. Please understand this and maybe some Christmas in the future we will have these traditions again.

Please allow me to talk about my child, if I feel a need. Don't be uncomfortable with my tears. My heart is breaking and the tears are a way of letting out my sadness.

I plan to do something special in memory of my child. Please recognize my need to do this in order to keep our memories alive.

My fear is not that I'll forget, but that you will. Please don't criticize me if I do something that you don't think is normal. I'm a different person now and it may take a long time before this different person reaches an acceptance of my child's death.

As I survive the stages of grief, I will need your patience and support, especially during these holiday times and the "special" days throughout the year.

Thank you for not expecting too much from me this holiday season.

Love A Bereaved Parent

For the New Year...

Instead of the old kind of New Year's resolutions we used to make and break, let's make some this year and really try to keep them.

Try not to imagine the future; take one day at a time.

Allow yourself time to cry, both alone and with your loved ones.

Don't shut out other family members from your thoughts and feelings. Share these difficult times. You may all become closer for it.

Try to be realistic about your expectations of yourself, your spouse, other family members and friends. If each of us is unique and different, how can there be perfect understanding?

When a good day comes, relish it. Don't feel guilty and don't be discouraged because it doesn't last. They will come again and multiply.

Take care of your health. Even though the mind might not care, a sick body will only compound your troubles. Drink lots of water, take stress-type vitamins, rest (even if you don't sleep), and get moderate exercise. Help your body to heal as well as your mind.

Share your feelings with other compassionate friends and let them share with you. You will find that as you begin caring about the pain of others, you will start to come out of your shell—a very healthy sign.

I know that following these resolutions won't be easy, but what has been? It is worth a try. There is nothing to lose and perhaps much to gain.

The School Year And Beyond

By Liz Conway

At this time of the year many parents have to face the prospect of children starting or returning to school. This prospect can mean different things to different people. Some mums are delighted that their children will be occupied for 6-8 hours each day and the house will once again be quiet.

For some parents it can bring on an attack of the "should haves"

My son/daughter should have been –
starting kindy
starting pre-school
last year in primary school
first year in secondary school
last year in secondary school

You should have been –
covering books
labelling clothes
making lunch
rostering for tuckshop
going on excursions

Then there is the torment of the helpful comments from other people. Comments such as
"What will you do with all your spare time now?"
"Aren't you lucky to have no more children at home"
"You must save so much money not having children going to school"

What emotions that these comments stir in your heart! It is just as well that broken hearts are not visible otherwise the sight of these emotions would be too much for other people to cope with.

Then there is the realisation of the full picture – no school photos, no graduations, no prefects, no school captains, no school camps, no parent teacher talks, no school fetes, no school fees.....So how do you cope with this scenario? Acknowledging the hurt, understanding that just as your child is a part of your family forever, forever there will be reminders that your precious child is not here to experience all that life offers.

Being prepared for events such as starting school, family occasions, may ease the amount of anguish you feel. You may plan in advance what you will do on these days so there will be some meaning to the day, not just another day of emotional pain.

Talking with other bereaved parents may help – everyone will go through these situations. Whatever you do, be kind to yourself; remember that there are millions of parents around the world who are also facing this situation. Draw strength from the knowledge that you are not alone.

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This Can Be A Constructive, If not a happy, year...

By Margaret H Gerner, TCF St Louis , MO

HAPPY NEW YEAR??? “How can it ever be again?” “How will I ever make it through another year of this torment?”

When we are hurting and so terribly depressed, it is hard to see any good in our new year, but we must try. First, we must hold on tightly to the idea that we will not always be this miserable, that we will some day feel good again. This is almost impossible to believe, but even if we don't believe it, we must tell ourselves over and over again that IT IS TRUE – BECAUSE IT IS! Many parents whose children have died in the past will attest to this. Remember also, no-one can suffer indefinitely as you are suffering now.

Second, we must face the new year with the knowledge that this year offers us a CHOICE — whether we will be on our way to healing this time next year or still be in the pit of intense grief. We must remind ourselves that if we choose to be on our way to healing by the following year, we must work to get there and that work entails allowing ourselves to go through our grief, to cry, to be angry, to talk about our guilt's, to do whatever is necessary to move towards healing.

Third, we must look for good in our lives and find reasons to go on and accept the fact that our continued suffering will not bring our child back. Many of us have other children and a spouse for whom we must go on. More important, we have our own lives that must be lived. Most of us know that our dead children would want us to go on!

No, this coming year may not be a happy one, but it can be a constructive one. Through our grief we can grow and become more understanding, loving, compassionate, and aware of the real values in life.

LET US NOT WASTE THIS NEW YEAR.

Taken from Dec 01/Jan 02 TCF Qld Newsletter

Holiday Depression

Written by Clara Hinton, Nov 25, 2002

Depression is becoming as familiar as the common cold. Because we are now aware of the symptoms of depression, we can more easily identify when a person is suffering from the pain and loneliness of depression. By being aware of what to look for, we can now use skills that can help us diminish symptoms and sometimes avoid holiday depression following child loss.

Probably the single most difficult thing to face is the reality that your child will not physically be with you during the holiday. Because the word holiday reminds us of such things as parties, family gatherings, and festive occasions, one can easily slip into depression just by thinking about trying to carry out the familiar holiday traditions you once experienced with your child.

How can you diminish or avoid holiday depression? Don't set your expectations too high! Reminders of your child are everywhere, so it's necessary for you to be gentle with yourself. For many parents, getting dressed and eating a meal on a holiday is a major accomplishment. Remember—there is no right or wrong way to handle the day. Do what is most appropriate for you to get through the day.

If you have younger children in the household, explain to them that this year will be a little different. Call on grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends to help with your younger children. Ease the guilt you have about possibly taking joy from your living children by allowing other to help! During the holiday season, you will find that most people are receptive to helping, so don't be afraid to ask. You will find that more help is available than you imagined.

Call your family together and choose doing something a little different. Change the menu for your meal. Visit a church in a nearby community where you won't feel embarrassed if you cry. Celebrate the holiday on a different day, if the actual date of the holiday is too painful for you. You might even choose to go out of town for the holiday. This is a good time to break away from past holiday traditions. Doing things just a little bit different helps to ease your pain.

Remind yourself often that grief depletes you emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Exhaustion lends to depression. Don't expect too much of yourself. Instead of baking cookies, buy them from the supermarket. Don't worry about cleaning your house. Ask friends to help. If you don't feel like facing a lot of people in stores, order your gifts on the Internet. Rest should be your number one priority.

Holidays often magnify the feelings of loss you are experiencing. It is normal to want your child with you now more than ever before. Instead of trying to push away your grief feelings, let your tears fall. Release some of your emotions through prayer, journaling your thoughts, and seeking the emotional support of family and friends.

Remember—you will never “get over it”, and that's okay. But, you will “get through it”, and a day will come when you will do so with inner strength and a positive reserve of peace and joy. By preparing for the holidays without your child, you can actually have a bit of control of an otherwise out of control situation. This, too, will aid you in diminishing holiday depression. Each step forward is a step more in your journey through grief. With proper planning, you can make it through the holidays using the skills you've learned for avoiding holiday depression.

Wish for Bereaved Parents this New Year

To the newly bereaved

We wish you patience - patience with yourselves in the painful weeks, months, and even years ahead.

To the bereaved siblings

We wish you and your parents a new understanding of each other's needs and the beginnings of good communication.

To those of you who are single parents

We wish you the inner resources we know you will need to cope, often alone, with your loss.

To those of you who are plagued with guilt

We wish you the reassurance that you did the very best you could under the circumstances and that your child knew that.

To those of you who have experienced the death of more than one child
We wish you the endurance you will need to fight your way back to a meaningful life once again.

To those of you who are deeply depressed
We wish you the first steps out of the 'Valley of Shadow'.

To those of you experiencing marital difficulties after the death of your child
We wish you a special willingness and ability to communicate with each other.

To all the fathers
We wish you the ability to express your grief, to move beyond society's conditioning, to cry.

To those with few or no memories of your child, perhaps because you suffered through a stillbirth, miscarriage or infant death
We wish you the sure knowledge that your child is a person and that your grief is real.

To those of you who have experienced the death of an only child or of all of your children
We offer you our eternal gratitude for serving as such an inspiration to the rest of us.

To those of you unable to cry
We wish you healing tears.

To those of you tired, exhausted from grieving
We wish you the strength to face just one hour, just one more day.

To all others with special needs, that we have not mentioned
We wish you the understanding that you need and the assurance that you are loved.

Taken from "Johannesburg" Dec 03/Jan04 TCF Newsletter

Surviving Anniversaries

Written by Clara Hinton, Feb 04, 2003

We learn from little to mark special dates on our calendars. We write those dates in our journals. And, we anticipate several holidays each year. We love to celebrate joyful anniversaries! Our culture promotes this tradition of making note of special days and taking time away from our daily routine in order to observe anniversary dates.

When a child dies, there often is an entirely new slant on the way we view special anniversaries such as birthdays, a baby's due date, family vacations, or other significant days. Often, these anniversary days that were once anticipated with such joy have now become a source of dread and fear. The question is asked, "How will I survive the day?" An ominous feeling overcomes a parent as the anniversary day approaches.

How can a parent survive anniversary days when a child has died? Begin by telling someone about your fears. Don't try to face the day alone. Remind yourself that many times the build-up to the dreaded anniversary day is most often worse than the actual day.

Be aware of your needs, and take time to address those needs. Do you need time alone to visit the gravesite? Would it help to invite a few close friends to your home to reminisce good times shared with your child? Do you want to "do something" in order to give you a feeling of validating your grief on this

anniversary day? Many have found that planting a flower, releasing a balloon, or reading a letter at the gravesite that you've written has tremendous healing power.

Be sure to pay special attention to your physical, as well as emotional, needs as the anniversary day approaches. Get extra rest. Stress and anxiety deplete the body of energy and tax every one of the body's resources. Eat nutritious meals, especially paying close attention to food that will aid you in maintaining a balanced diet. This is not a time to fill yourself with junk foods that have little to no nutritious value. Be sure to get ample exercise each day. Walking will get you outside of the house and will help your cardiovascular system which, in turn, will improve your overall health. Physical activity will also release chemicals that will help to improve your emotional health during times of stress, too.

Always be sure to drink adequate fluids every day, especially water. It is vitally important to keep your body hydrated. Staying hydrated helps you to stay mentally alert and physically healthy. Good self-care is not selfish. Rather, taking care of yourself is essential.

Create new memories and new traditions for anniversary dates. Trying to keep everything the same following the death of a child is an impossible and unrealistic task. When your child died, all of life changed dramatically. Try doing something different to help you get through the anniversary day. If you always ate dinner at a favourite restaurant on your child's birthday, then order take-out food, and eat dinner in or find a new favourite restaurant. Choose something that will be healing and will still validate your grief and loss. Try to honour the day with positive memories of your times with your child. In the case of early pregnancy loss, you can observe the day by recalling those precious few moments you had when your dreams were being realized.

Above all else, remember that there is no right or wrong way to survive anniversaries now that your child has died. When you get through the day, you will feel relieved as you note that you have survived. A new milestone in your grief work has been reached.

Sisters & Brothers

Grief reactions following a sibling death

Grief following the death of a sibling involves a range of grief reactions, including disbelief, despair, guilt, anger, and helplessness.

Grieving the loss of past, present, and future. The sibling bond begins at birth and usually continues throughout life. Siblings are friends, protectors, and confidants who share the same memories, connections, and history.

When a sibling dies, you lose not only your present relationship with them, but also a part of your past and the role that your brother or sister would have played in your future.

Grief may go unrecognised. Siblings are sometimes referred to as "forgotten mourners" because their grief is overshadowed by the grief of other family members, such as the deceased sibling's parents, spouse, or children. You are often expected to recover quickly from your own grief to comfort your parents or your sibling's spouse. If you are married, your spouse may not experience the same degree of grief and may not understand why you are so upset, especially if you and your sibling did not appear to have a close relationship.

Experiencing guilt. Sibling relationships are complicated, with love and affection existing along with rivalry, jealousy, and arguments. You may feel guilty over things you once said or did, or you may feel guilty about not maintaining a closer relationship as adults. Brothers and sisters often feel the need to

protect each other and surviving siblings may feel guilty or helpless at not being able to prevent the death. Some siblings also experience "survivor guilt" and may question why their brother or sister died instead of them.

Redefining your role in the family. Family members have different, often unspoken, roles and responsibilities within the family, such as taking care of aging parents or being the one everyone calls in a crisis. When a sibling dies, these roles and responsibilities shift and change. Taking on new responsibilities, such as becoming a caregiver for a parent, can cause additional stress and resentment in grieving siblings. Explicit family roles also change. With the death of your sibling, you may suddenly become the oldest child or an only child.

Internet Article www.cancer.net

Grief Speaks Sibling Loss

"I am so sorry about your sister or brother. How are your poor parents doing? Remember to be good, since your parents are dealing with so much heartache." This is something that many siblings hear following the loss of their sibling. When the death was of a young person, people focus their sympathy to the parents, often ignoring the loss of the sibling. When the death was of someone who may be older with a family, the focus of the sympathy goes to the spouse and children. Siblings, both young and older, are often overlooked in their own heartache and grief.

Siblings suffer a profound loss after the death of a sibling. That loss is every bit as painful as that of the person's parents. Understanding a loss is paramount if mourning is to occur. Yet, most siblings hear over and over again, that it wasn't really their loss, and eventually they begin to believe that.

Internet article www.griefspeaks.com

How Losing A Sibling Really Affects You

By Sarah Davis

I hope you are finding Sarah Davis' article in the previous newsletters to be a useful reading resource and as I stated, I am going to touch on more of her editorial, 'Guilt and Regrets'. I found that when my brother, Mark, died 16 years ago, I was consumed of guilt and many regrets. All the arguments, fights and all the nasty things we did and said to each other, I wished I could have taken it all back. The main regret that devastated me was that I never got a chance to say 'Good-bye' to him and to tell him how much I loved him and to thank him for being the best 'big brother' I could ever have had. He was my protector and I will always remember the day he said to me "you are my baby sis, I will always stick up for you, so let me know if anyone causes you any trouble". I felt so safe hearing that and I just smiled at him and said 'thanks'. Not long after he said this to me he died. Our sibling relationship was just shifting into a beautiful, caring new phase. I will always miss him and wonder every day what he would have been like and know that he would have been an awesome Uncle to my children. I was fortunate enough to be able to share memories with my beautiful big sister, Tanya, we spoke of him often and reminisced about the past. This brings me to why I did not want to have the same guilt emotion when she passed away in February. Mark was a sudden death and Tanya fought a courageous battle with cancer, and knew she didn't have much time, so I spent every waking moment with her and told her how much she was loved and thanked her being there for me and my children day in and day out (my whole life). We knew each other inside and out, we were the best of friends. But I still have small regrets with her death and how can you truly say 'good bye' to someone who is slowly losing their fight for life. Lastly, this leaves me with survivor guilt, that we all suffer! Every day I do question why it was my brother and sister who had to die (we had a perfect family of five, and now I am the only child!), and why did my Mum and

Dad have to lose two of their beautiful children—WHY?? I will always wonder, but in the meantime I strive to give my children the best possible future and I always hang onto HOPE—I find that it helps me with my grief. I wish you all strength and amity as Christmas is fast approaching, and hope you all get through the day the best you can. I wish I didn't have to face Christmas this year as it is my first without my beautiful sister and my children are feeling it too by not having their fun loving Aunty here to brighten our day with the Christmas spirit (Christmas was Tanya's favourite time of the year and she always got into the Christmas festivities). I am starting a new tradition this year as it is also the first Christmas I will be experiencing on my own without my children as well, as I am newly divorced and this year my children will be with their Dad until late in the afternoon, so I have discussed with my Mum & Dad if we can change our old tradition (a breakfast and lunch til early afternoon) and start a new one, which will be an afternoon tea and dinner and unwrap the pressies later in the afternoon. Either way Christmas will never be the same and I know many tears will be shed this year. I will be lighting twoandles this year, one for my brother and one for my sister. I'm hoping for the next 4-5 weeks to pass very quickly. Until next time, take care and I wish you all the best, Karen Kirkpatrick. This is Sarah's piece of writing on Guilt and Regrets..... hope you find the read informative.


Guilt: The guilt that comes hand in hand with losing a sibling is overwhelming. Siblings have a very special relationship. Loving each other, not being able to stand each other, competition, rivalry, growing up together, knowing each other inside and out, teasing, and defending each other are all just a tiny piece of this. As the surviving sibling, we dissect every thing we can remember having said or done and wonder how it could have been better. Those childhood fights and arguments turn into these horrible things that we did, the awful siblings we were. At some point, most realize that the things they were feeling guilty for happen to everyone. Those "bad" things would have been forgotten or laughed about in later years if our sibling hadn't died. Most guilt is irrational, something that we have to cling to and wonder about. Worrying about how we could have stopped their death, changed the circumstances surrounding it, knowing for sure that we did something wrong or caused it.

There is also survivor guilt, feeling guilty for living when your sibling didn't get to grow up or finish their life. Eating, dating, going for a movie, having fun with friends, any sort of pleasure brings intense guilt along with it. Thinking that it should have been you, that you didn't deserve to live if they couldn't. Knowing that the things you're experiencing should be what your sibling has too, getting married, having children, buying a house. Usually this is immediately following the death when it is totally consuming. It takes a lot of time to go away completely if it ever does.

Regrets: There is a very fine line between guilt and regrets. A lot of the things we feel guilty for are also the things we most regret. Every single sibling surveyed had regrets, at least one. Each surviving sibling has different regrets depending on the circumstances and their relationship with their sibling. The most common answers were not being able to say goodbye, taking them for granted and assuming they'd always be here, not saying how much they loved their brother/sister, not spending more time with them, fighting too much, not being able to do something to prevent the death, not being there when they died, and not appreciating the time they had together while they had it.

For those of us who lost our younger sibling, many of us regret how we reacted about our "baby" brother or sister following us around and copying us, "our little shadows". We knew that they did it because they loved us, but we didn't want them around and couldn't understand the reasons for that at the time. At the same time, "baby" brothers and sisters feel guilty for being the little shadow...For doing the following, bothering their older sibling, being a pest on purpose...For all the tattling and trying to get the big brother or sister in trouble. Younger surviving siblings have a lot of problems feeling like they need to step into their siblings footsteps, follow with what their sibling was doing at the time of their death. They take the same courses in school, not because it makes them happy, but to be closer to their sibling. They feel bad when they pass the grade in school that their sibling didn't make it through...younger surviving siblings also have high expectations to live up to with their parents but especially to themselves. Their older sibling suddenly becomes a standard to live up to, the things they accomplished seem bigger and brighter than anything the survivor can manage to do.

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