United Journey

Supporting parents, grandparents and siblings after a child dies.
Inspired by the journeys of The Compassionate Friends families

The Compassionate Friends Queensland
Supporting family after a child dies

Some helpful reading following the death of a son, daughter, brother, sister or grandchild

In this package we have compiled some literature that other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings from The Compassionate Friends have found to be helpful.

Included is information about loss and grief that we hope will provide some comfort in your bereavement.

If we can help with further information or support please do not hesitate to contact us at anytime on our 24 hour National Helpline **1300 064 068.**

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"Friends tried not to mention his name, but my heart ached to talk about him"
– TCF member

When a child dies...Who can help?

A world-wide family of bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. Caring for one another, offering hope, friendship and support. Grieving, healing and growing together.

The Compassionate Friends 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 will 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.

Introducing The Compassionate Friends

Support and friendship for parents, brothers, sisters and grandparents after the death of a child at any age and from any cause.

When a son or daughter dies

No one expects to attend their own child's funeral, yet every year thousands of newly bereaved families face a future in which their lives have been changed forever.

Immediately after the death, parents and families are usually surrounded by relatives, friends and those in the caring professions. Later this support often lessens just when the pain of bereavement seems to grow more intense. This is when The Compassionate Friends offers continuing help, which is there for as long as the parents and family want and need it.

The Compassionate Friends

A feeling common among newly bereaved parents is that those around them cannot truly understand the depth of their grief, that only someone who has "been through it themselves" could possibly know what they are feeling.

The Compassionate Friends is a self-help group offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. We have available a great deal of helpful information on grief and produce a quarterly magazine for bereaved parents by bereaved parents. The Compassionate Friends is a world-wide organisation with specific purposes and goals:

- To offer support and friendship to any grieving parent, regardless of race, religion, or economic situation.
- To listen with understanding and sensitivity to the needs of others.
- To provide support groups that create an atmosphere of openness and honesty.
- To provide educational programs for better understanding of the grief process.
- To provide contact with other bereaved parents who have, in time, found fresh hope and strength for living through their association with each other.

The Compassionate Friends respects the privacy and grief of others, a bereaved parent must request information and support. The Compassionate Friends meetings are not therapy groups. Healing is slowly and gently promoted as parents gain understanding and express their feelings in a warm, supportive atmosphere in which empathy, privacy and confidentiality are assured.

At their own request, a parent whose child has died is contacted by someone who cares, a parent like themselves who has suffered the same loss, a compassionate friend who understands the pain and grief. When the parent is ready to talk about the death of their child and their feelings, the friend is there, ready, and willing to listen. Death is not a simple topic for casual conversation, most people are afraid of it as it touches their very souls with its certainty and permanency. Too often people feel that if they ignore death, it will never happen. Scholars and churches have for years debated the question, whether death is the end of life or simply the beginning of a new life, often forgetting the people who have been affected by death, but to a grieving parent, death is an invisible barrier, an impenetrable wall, separating them from their child.

In society today, people treat the death of a child as something that should not be talked about. Grieving parents are treated at best as a social annoyance, at worst like lepers. Like the three proverbial monkeys, society tries to ward off 'evil' by not hearing, speaking to, or seeing the bereaved parents. Often heard at meetings is "They didn't even mention her name, and they didn't want me to talk about her either!" Even on family occasions, the name of the child isn't mentioned. Whilst at general social functions, the death is treated as something to be forgotten as quickly as possible. As if any parent could forget that such a precious gift, their child, is gone.

In contemporary society the loss of a child is considered unthinkable, it is okay for the old to die (they have lived their lives) but we expect children to live on after us. For society in general, the death of a child is the loss of the future. For the parents, the death is the loss of part of themselves, the loss of their personal investment in the future and their own immortality, and the physical and emotional anguish they experience is

"At last I know I'm not alone in my grief – others had to go down this road and they understand my feelings"
– TCF member

like no other.

In 1969, in Coventry, England, the Rev Simon Stephens founded The Compassionate Friends whilst assistant to the Chaplain of the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. Rev Stephens witnessed the deaths of many children as a result of accidents or incurable illness. He saw that whilst everything that could be done for the children physically was done, there was no support for the grieving parents. Medical staff didn't have the time or the 'heart' to help.

The inspiration for the formation of our freely available self-help group came from the chance meeting of the parents of two boys (near the same age) who were brought to the hospital at about the same time. The two families started to talk to each other and a relationship of support and understanding grew. After the children died the friendship continued and the parents found that, at least with each other, they could speak openly about their children and know that they were being listened to. They could share their feelings and cry without fear of embarrassment to themselves or anyone else. And, because they were allowed this freedom, the shared burden was no longer intolerable – they were able to help each other through their grief. These two families started to meet with other parents whose children had died in the hospital and the value of the talking, listening and sharing, in the 'healing' of grief was proven.

In time, bereaved parents in Coventry asked Rev Stephens to work with them in establishing a group for parents who needed to share their grief. The Coventry parents wanted other parents to be able to experience the support, understanding and caring that they were able to get from each other. From these simple beginnings, The Compassionate Friends was born. The first Chapter in the United States of America started in Florida in 1971. In Australia, a Chapter began in Melbourne in 1978, and the following year (1979) Sydney held its first meeting. Today, The Compassionate Friends Chapters can be found in many countries throughout the world.

Many bereaved parents can only feel comfortable and at ease in the company of other bereaved parents. Rightly, they feel that another bereaved parent can understand the depths of their anger and despair. With each other, they can talk openly without fear of ridicule or embarrassment. The Compassionate Friends provides bereaved parents a haven of understanding and empathy, and the opportunity to grieve in their own way, in their own time, with support, caring and hope.

Although our Founder is a clergyman, and some Chapters use donated church facilities, The Compassionate Friends has no religious affiliation.

How The Compassionate Friends can help

Members of The Compassionate Friends, all of whom are bereaved, offer time to listen and share experiences and feelings in a safe place. We all have different needs and circumstances and The Compassionate Friends has a wide range of support services to try and meet your needs.

- Bereaved Parents, Grandparents & Siblings support centre located in Greenslopes - providing an opportunity to meet families who have also lived through the experience of losing a child. Please call the office to make a time to come in.
- 24/7 National Helpline to provided by volunteers who have also experienced the pain of the death of a child.
- Support and Social groups run by Bereaved Parent, Grandparents and Siblings at various locations around Queensland.
- Quarterly Magazine.
- Library of books & Support media, (Web page, Guest book page and facebook).
- Information on Grief and Loss.
- Annual Walk to Remember.
- Annual Seminar including workshops.
- Annual Memorial Service

What to do next

If you think The Compassionate Friends may be able to help you then please contact us.

We understand that phoning the Helpline may be difficult for you but remember that the person answering will also be a bereaved parent, sibling or grandparent.

Alternatively, you (or others wishing to help a bereaved family) can visit our website or contact our office on 07 3540 9949.

Understanding Grief

Grief, with its many ups and downs lasts far longer than society in general recognises. Be patient with yourself. The period of time before one adjusts back to “normal” life after the loss of a child can be very long.

Each person’s grief is individual. You and your spouse will experience it and cope with it differently, so be prepared for this. Understanding that there will be big variations in your forms of grieving and behaviour can make you much more tolerant and understanding of each other.

Crying is an acceptable and healthy expression of grief and releases built up tension for mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. Cry freely as you feel the need. Remember the old saying “Tears wash the wounds of the soul”.

Physical reactions to death of a child may include loss of appetite or overeating, sleeplessness, and sexual difficulties. Parents may find that they have very little energy, are always tired and cannot concentrate. A balanced diet, rest and moderate exercise are especially important for the whole family at this time.

Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol. Medication should be taken sparingly and only under the management of your physician. Many substances are addictive and can lead to a chemical dependence. In addition, they may stop or delay the grieving process.

Friends and relatives may be uncomfortable around you. They want to ease your pain but do not know how. Take the initiative and help them learn how to be supportive of you.

Talk about your child so that they know this is appropriate. Don’t be too proud and self-reliant, give people the opportunity to get close to you and help you.

Whenever possible, put off major decisions (changing residence, changing jobs, etc.) for at least a year.

Avoid making hasty decisions about your child’s belongings. Do not allow others to take over or to rush you. You can do it little by little whenever you feel ready. It is often comforting to leave things as they are for a time.

Parents may feel they have nothing to live for and may think about a release from this intense pain. Be assured that many parents feel this way but that a sense of purpose and meaning does return. The intense pain does lessen. It becomes duller and eventually leaves a sadness tinged with many beautiful memories. Hope for this to happen one day.

Guilt, real or imagined, is a normal part of grief. It surfaces in thoughts and feelings of “if only”. In order to resolve this guilt, learn to express and share these feelings and learn to forgive yourself. It may help to talk these feelings over with an understanding counsellor.

Anger is another common reaction to loss. Anger, like guilt, needs expression and sharing in a healthy and acceptable manner. However, it often happens that we over-react and “blow our tops”. If family and friends understand this might happen sometimes, they are more tolerant.

Children are often the forgotten grievers within a family. They are experiencing many of the same emotions you are, so share thoughts and tears with them. Though this is a painful time, be sure they feel loved and included. Talk to them and cry with them. Hold them physically and don’t let them think they have to be strong for your sake.

Holidays and anniversaries of your child’s death and birth can be a stressful time. Consider the feelings of the entire family in planning how to spend the day. Allow time and space for your own emotional needs. Sometimes the anticipation of the day is far worse than the day when it actually comes.

A child’s death often causes a parent to challenge and examine his faith or philosophy of life. Don’t be disturbed if you are questioning old beliefs. Talk about it. For many, faith offers help to accept the unacceptable. This is the time for deep thinking, reading, working out priorities. Nothing else will ever activate this side of your nature more profoundly.

It helps to become involved with a group of parents having similar experiences; sharing eases loneliness and promotes the expression of your grief in an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding. This is why parents worldwide find The Compassionate Friends so helpful.

Bereaved parents and their families can find healing and hope for the future as they reorganise their lives in a positive way, but it doesn’t happen overnight!

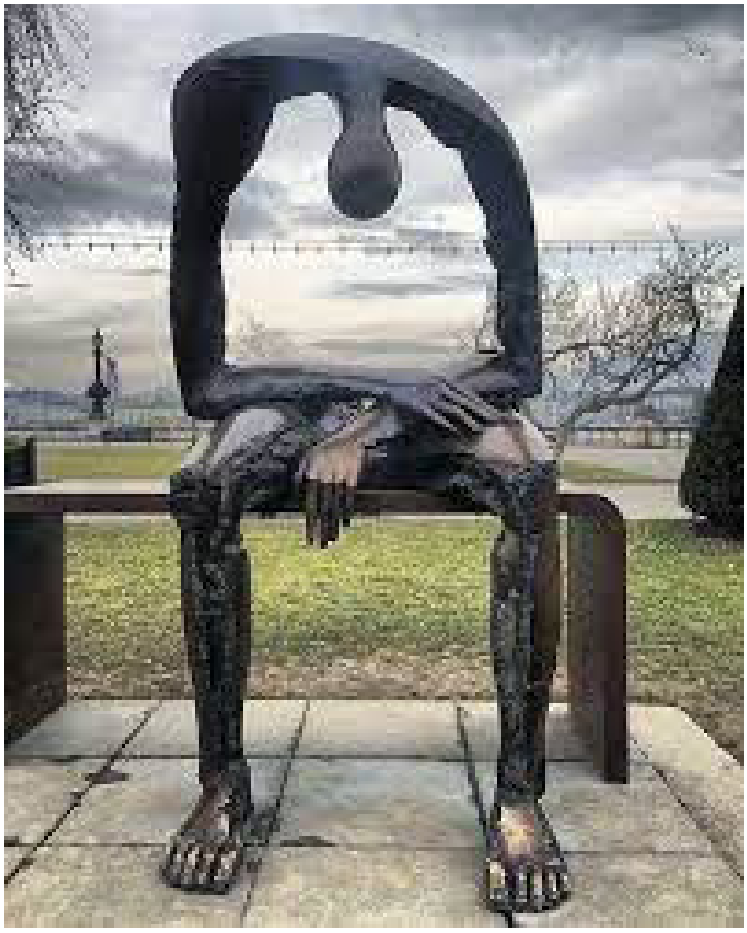
Grief of the newly bereaved

For a parent, there is nothing more devastating than the death of our child. How do we begin to comprehend the enormity of our loss? How do we learn to cope in such unfamiliar territory? We feel totally unprepared for what seems an impossible task, that of learning to live without our child.

First reactions of shock, numbness, denial and disbelief help to cushion us against the full impact of our loss. It is when this protection against the cruel reality of the death begins to wear off that we begin to feel the full extent of our grief. Feelings of wanting to join our dead child are not uncommon and the ordinary things of life have very little meaning. It is quite usual for us to feel that we are going crazy at this time, because our emotions are so extreme, but this is a normal physical and psychological reaction to deep loss. Many bereaved parents share these bewildering thoughts and emotions.

For a long time our child is constantly in the forefront of our mind; we may experience intense feelings of emptiness and loneliness, and a deep desire to hold our child again. We may feel dead inside, as if part of us has died too. There are reminders of our child in all we see and touch and hear; we may think we hear our child's voice or see their familiar figure in the street. We still sometimes expect them to walk through the door. At a very deep level of the unconscious we are still 'searching' for our child.

We may feel angry at the insensitivity of others to our feelings and needs. Some friends and acquaintances expect us to function 'normally' within a short time of our child's death. We feel that others are sometimes uncomfortable in our company and that they avoid mentioning our child's name "for fear of reminding us", and if we mention what is uppermost in our mind, they change the subject. This



is hurtful and difficult to cope with. We are bewildered at the intensity of our grief; we feel vulnerable and ill at ease in the world around us. Telling our friends openly how we feel, and that it helps to talk about our child, will release the tension and increase understanding on both sides.

Sometimes we fear we shall forget what our child looked like, or that we may not be able to recall their voice. Seeing our child's clothes and belongings around the house brings back painful memories. We need not make hurried decisions about our child's personal things. We can pack them away until we feel ready to sort them out. In time we may wish to keep some as treasures, and they will indeed become a comfort. Some may have special meanings to any surviving children or our child's friends; the gift of some of our child's belongings could be an important step in working through our grief.

The shattering experience of our child's death may create tensions within our marriage or partnership. All the understanding that has been developed over the years together will be put to a severe test. We feel that we should be able to console each other, and many do, but we also discover that we are individuals who have to grieve in our own way, at our own pace. We may not have the strength to comfort each other as we would wish, nor to understand our partner's grief pattern. Tolerance, affection and patience are the keywords in helping each other through this devastating experience.

If you have surviving children, remember that they too are

grieving. They are often the 'forgotten mourners' within a family. They need their parents' love most especially at this time, and excluding them from the family sorrow will only add to the fear and confusion that they may already be feeling. A family is helped and strengthened by the sharing of its grief. There is also a support group for brothers and sisters with its own magazine.

Tears are an important way of expressing anguish and if you can you need to cry, perhaps in the privacy of your child's room. It is good to let the tears flow and cope with them as best we can; it is usually better to weep than to bottle it up. But for some people the tears stay locked inside.

Physical exhaustion is a very common symptom of early bereavement. It can be a mistake to waste energy pretending to be in control when you feel far from it. Be yourself whenever possible. Try to eat sensibly and rest as much as you can, even though sleep may be elusive in the early weeks and months. Walks and exercise in the fresh air may help restore normal sleep patterns; and other relaxation techniques can also be useful.

Most bereaved people suffer from depression at some stage in their grief. The main thing to remember is that this is not a permanent state; it will pass when its purpose has been achieved although some of us may need professional help if it deepens and persists. It is a time which many of us describe as being "grey and lifeless", when we have no appetite for anything that previously gave us pleasure. However, colour does slowly return to our lives and imperceptibly we realise that we have more energies to cope with our new life without our child.

There are no short cuts through grieving. In the early days we are often searching for a time-table; we want to know how long it will take. We wish that someone would wave a magic wand to relieve our pain, to bring back our child and the life we had before. Accepting that this cannot happen is one of the stages along our grief journey. The first birthday, the anniversary of the death and Christmas are especially painful times.

Face each new obstacle or problem as it occurs - and don't let others pressurise you! Try not to look too far ahead, take one day and one step at a time. Some days will be better than others, our grief cannot be hurried. No one can grieve for us, we have to do it ourselves, but we don't have to do it alone. Other people - family, friends, people working in the field of bereavement - can be very helpful too.

Symptoms of early grief such as tiredness, loss of short-term memory and lack of concentration will all improve gradually, as will energy levels and the ability to organise daily life. Not knowing what is 'normal' can bring extra anxiety and so it is helpful to take time to read and to learn as much as we can about grief.

In time you will find it possible to enjoy yourself again, unbelievable though it may seem when you are newly bereaved. Role models are important - it gives hope and encouragement to see other bereaved parents getting on with their lives and even helping others to take their first steps in the adjustment to the death of their child. The Compassionate Friends can provide support in different ways - only another bereaved parent can fully understand the pain and anguish of your child's untimely death. Their willingness to listen and their gentle encouragement may give you the strength you need to carry on. You may find it helpful to attend meetings in your area, letters or the telephone. Information on grief and suggestions from other bereaved parents can be found in The Compassionate Friends magazine.

Slowly the intensity of our grief diminishes and we begin to take up the threads of life again, moving into what will become our new normality. We all know that life will never be the same after the death of our child, but time and the mutual support of shared experiences will help us to find ways to honor our child's life, to rebuild our own, and to grow in wisdom, strength and love.

Grief is like having a jagged stone inside oneself; as time passes the jagged edges gradually become smooth, but the stone remains.

Living with grief

We are in a state of shock and numbness that is gradually overtaken by the pain of grief. As well as deep sadness, we may feel anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, apathy and despair.

Our preoccupation with thoughts of our dead child can make us think that we are going mad. Sometimes we engage in restless over-activity and suffer from exhaustion. Sleep and appetite patterns are disturbed. We may feel helpless, confused and out of control. All of these feelings are perfectly normal. Every bereaved parent goes through some, or even all, of these experiences at different times; some may be more troubling than others.

Individuals grieve differently. There is no timetable for grief and, initially, even survival seems impossible. Grief is not orderly or progressive: it pours in with great turmoil, and is not predictable in its timing or intensity. It comes in waves and often feels utterly overwhelming.

Gradually, however, the interval between the waves extends, and very slowly some of the grief and pain begins to abate.

Facing the pain of grief takes courage. We need to talk about our child's life and the circumstances of the death. There are good memories to be shared, but most of us, at first, are devastated by the unfulfilled dreams and shattered hopes.

We must find ways of expressing emotions and coping with them. Grief's emotions can often feel unmanageable, but, at these times, it can help to allow ourselves and others to cry, not bottling up our feelings.

None of us expects that our son or daughter will die before us. The worst thing that any parent can imagine has happened, and grief is our right as well as our burden.

Almost every parent feels a sense of guilt when their child dies. We can feel guilty over things we have done or not done, said or not said to our child.

We may blame ourselves over the cause of death - for example, letting our child have a car, go backpacking, go swimming, and so on. We may feel that we should not be alive when our child is dead. Whether the death occurred suddenly, or after a long illness, we may torture ourselves with thoughts that we should have taken better care of our child, so that their suffering might have been reduced or death averted.

If you think that you did not do enough for your child, is this how you would judge someone else whose child had died? So often we demand more of ourselves than we expect of other. Almost every parent does the best they can in a situation where there are no rehearsals or second chances.

Later we may think that we should have done something differently, but that is with the benefit of hindsight. Perhaps there may be a rational cause for guilt, and professional help may be needed to cope with this situation.

Anger and rage are also part of grief. We may feel angry over the circumstances of our child's death, or with the people involved.

We may resent relatives, friends or colleagues for the things they say, or omit to say.

We may blame God, and bewail the unfairness of life, asking, "Why did this happen to me?" These feelings are natural: the reversal of normal expectations is shattering. Anger can feel a negative or destructive force, but we can use its power in a positive way.

All of us will experience intense sadness after the death of our child. It settles upon us along with the raging and searching aspects of grief. Then comes the yearning and the realisation of what 'never again' means in our mourning.

Some feel a suffocating weight in the chest, or an impenetrable darkness, a grey fog, an absence of colour in everyday things. We are agitated or lethargic, or swing from one to the other, losing interest in everyday tasks and finding it almost impossible to complete them. We may weep constantly - or be quite unable to cry.

We seek refuge or oblivion in sleep - only to lie awake hour after hour. Our rest is sometimes disturbed by vivid dreams about our children, and we wake up unrefreshed. Living with grief involves discovering how to handle our constantly changing feelings, finding ways to channel them into activities which release the tension they create.

So what can we do to help ourselves? All that follow are things that we can choose to do; many of us have work, paid or in the home, that is often used to distract ourselves. Some suggestions which others have found useful include physical activities such as walking, swimming, cycling, dancing and gardening, as well as organised sports. These can aid our general health and well-being. Aromatherapy, massage, reflexology, yoga, or tai chi are relaxing.

Creative pursuits such as writing, drawing, painting, sewing, crafts, cooking and music-making can occupy the mind. Reading, listening to music, solving crosswords or other puzzles improve our concentration.

Some of us find it therapeutic to write down our thoughts and feelings, even if the pages are torn up later. Being able to talk freely to a sympathetic friend is very reassuring, especially when we have bad days. Joining classes, finding part-time or voluntary work, campaigning or fund-raising for charity can help us to adjust to life after the death of our child.

The stress of our child's death can leave us vulnerable to infection and illness. To counteract this we need to be aware of our diet and the need for rest. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, healing begins to take place. There are brief moments of enjoyment - and these are often followed by overwhelming guilt. We need not feel disloyal to our child when we begin to laugh again.

In the early days, some bereaved parents may find unexpected meetings difficult. It may be beneficial to change our routines, so that we are less likely to encounter people who know us - shopping at a supermarket further away from home, or attending different classes or clubs, for example.

We must not feel that we have to go to social occasions, such as parties at work: the small talk often revolves around family life, with people that we know, and a frequent question from people to whom we have not spoken before is, "How many children have you got?" (Do we include our dead child in the number that we answer?)

Other people will think that they know what is good for "taking us out of ourselves", but we know better! Self-preservation is the keyword.

Adjustment means gradual integration of our child's death into our lives. We will never be the same again: some friends will be lost to us, and new ones will be made. We will always love and remember our son or daughter, but the memories and photographs that so upset us in the early days will become a comfort, and make us smile as well as weep.

Family and friends generally rally round at first to help us bereaved parents through our grief. However, as time passes, they may not be able to continue their support, or they think they have given sufficient comfort, and it is here that The Compassionate Friends serves its unique purpose - to provide a safe place for parents to talk about their children, of their life and death.

One of the most difficult things for us as parents is to see the effect of grief upon others in the family. It is not easy to support them while coping with our own grief. The Compassionate Friends have produced leaflets to help understand these situations.

Some parents have a religious faith which can be of immeasurable support to them at this time; others find that they now question long-held beliefs. Some discover a faith and others work out their own understanding of the meaning of life and death.

Can it be possible to move forward after enduring the death of our beloved child? Yes, indeed, it is possible, after such a traumatic happening, to weave that experience into our lives, but it will take many months, or probably years.

It will eventually be possible to use our child's possessions with warm and loving memories; we will be able to resume social activities, and go on holiday again. However, we will have changed, our lives have changed, and we will now find that we have a different perspective on what we feel is important to ourselves and our families.

The support, comfort and understanding gained through talking to someone else who has experienced the devastating death of their child is profound, and the help each receives from the other plays a very important part in living with grief, carrying our children with us in our hearts and minds.

A Mothers grief

When we first become a mother, our life changes. We experience powerful feelings of protection, and want always to be able to say, "I'm here. You're safe".

When our children are young, they become our highest priority, and we accept new and wide responsibilities. We give up sleep, energy, privacy, and time, putting our child's needs ahead of our own as we adapt to their time frame.

We become nurse, teacher, handyman and referee along with many other things too. Becoming a mother changes us and, through all the changes, we find strengths and skills in ourselves, of which we were perhaps unaware. We develop patience, empathy and accord with another human being who, at least initially, is totally vulnerable.

Being a mother can expand our sense of who we are or what we might become. There can be new issues, new questions in our lives, presented by our role as a parent. In one way we might be stronger and more confident, but we could also feel that we ourselves have become more vulnerable.

When our child dies, we lose a part of ourselves, not only because they are our children, but also because of the way they have become entwined with our own identity. We may experience an over-whelming sense of failure; we thought that we could protect them and keep them safe, and we have been shown in the harshest way possible that we were wrong.

Whatever age our child is when they die, we still feel the unfairness of their death. The natural order of things is that parents die before their children; anything else is against nature, an accident, a catastrophe.

Our physical loss

When we have given birth to our child, the physical sense of losing a part of ourselves, if that child dies, is searing. We carried our child in our womb and our body was their source of nourishment. Their birthday was literally that: the day we gave them birth. On that day, we went through the pains of labour; now we have the pains of grief.

Many of us, at least in the early days of our bereavement, feel the loss of our child as an intensely physical pain. As time goes by, some of us see the anniversary of the day they were born to be a very lonely and difficult time, because our memories of it are unique to us. We may find ourselves reliving those hours each year. That is something even the closest members of our family may not be able to share, or even comprehend.

Around the country there are numerous mothers who have not given birth to their child or children, but have adopted or fostered them. These children are loved and cherished as any birth child, and such mothers often say that their child grew in their heart, the longing and waiting being just as real as had the child grown in their womb. The death of this child might well bring back to us how we had to deal with the earlier distress of infertility before he or she came to us.

Caring and losing

As mothers, our care for our young children has been intensely physical as well as emotional: we have fed them, bathed them, changed and dressed them, cuddled them and held them in our arms. Even when our children are older, the memories of physical care are part of the bond between us. Whether we have been through a long, all consuming battle with an illness, or suffer from the trauma that a sudden death brings, the circumstances in which they died will affect how we feel.

Have we become a 'childless parent' or even a single, childless parent? Each death brings its own particular burdens.

When our son or daughter dies, we may want to go on caring for them as long as possible. Mothers who are able to hold their dead child, wash and dress him or her, and perhaps place their little son or daughter in the coffin themselves, are able to bring this physical care to some sort of closure.

When a post-mortem is involved, we are prevented from doing this for a while, sometimes even forbidden to touch them, and that can hurt. It is hard to be deprived of these opportunities, for whatever reason, although some of us may find the task too daunting. Some mothers find the giving up of their child's body an agony, and the hurt continues for a long time.

If our child was an adult, we may not have the choice to continue with the physical caring; they may not have lived near us, they may have married or had a partner, so that we are no longer 'next of kin'. Although we may not see it at the time, the necessary procedures that follow on the death of our son or daughter in preparing for their funeral could be looked on as our continuation of caring.

Sadly, a few families have nobody to see, touch or bury. The conventional rituals of mourning are missed and strong desires can go unfulfilled.

Our surviving children

If we have surviving children, they continue to need our care, and in fact, if they are very young, their ongoing requirements can present us with the need for structure in our daily routine and that could be helpful to everyone in the household. Older children may need our care and support now more than ever, for they are probably confused and hurt. Their lives too have been changed.

Many children look back at the time immediately after the death of their brother or sister and say they felt as if they had lost their mother and father too, as though their whole family had disintegrated. We may know this is happening, yet be unable to prevent it. We can be so disabled by our grief that we find it difficult to be a mother to our other children. Sometimes we struggle to protect our children from the full extent of our grief, because it seems a burden too big for them to shoulder.

But this can leave them feeling even more alone; if we do not share our tears with them, they feel shut out. It is better to weep together than be separated by closed doors.

Our children's grief compounds our sense of guilt and our failure as a protector relates not just to our child's death but also to the fact that our other children are wounded as a consequence of that death. In reality, we can probably help them less with this than with any other pain they have experienced in their lives so far.

As mothers, our feelings of failure and guilt over the death of our child may give us an urge to overprotect our surviving children. We may even find it difficult to allow them to lead a normal life, to let them out of our sight. This is true especially if the death of our child was due to murder, or some terrible accident: we fear the same thing may happen again.

It may not be logical, but our protective mothering instinct is in overdrive and cannot easily be controlled. If a brother or sister died as a result of an illness, their siblings may have carried their own secret fears that they too are going to get sick. As mothers we need to try to understand their thoughts and allay their fears, but in our own distress we may not find these things easy.

Others in the family

We may be trying to support other members of our family at this time. Our own parents have lost a grandchild and will be grieving; as they see their daughter suffering, there is what can seem like a double burden.

We might feel that they need protecting from seeing the depths of our grief; but in fact most of us are helped by sharing rather than by pretending. Like our own children, we may feel we have lost our own mother, that she is unavailable to us because of her grief. We want to shout, "Who is mothering me?" We are fortunate indeed if there are people within our family able to answer our cry for help.

Coping alone

For a single parent there are other burdens. Not only do we have to be mother and father to our surviving children, but also we have no one to be with us in our worst times.

As well as feeling desperately alone, we may find that this loss reminds us of other, earlier losses, perhaps even the loss of our child's father, and we may feel doubly bereaved. In this situation, we urgently need the support of other adults, whether family, friends or professionals, so that we in turn will be able to help both ourselves and our surviving children. If we are now childless, the isolation is almost unbearable, and we may question our continuing identity as a mother.

Difficulties in grieving together

We may be shocked to find that we experience difficulties in our marriage or partnership. Even when we have been close, the pain of grief can drive a wedge between us. We think we should be able to share our loss, to support each other, but often it is not like that.

We may grieve in different ways, one needing words while the other needs silence, or perhaps action. We may find our partner's tears unbearably painful and may hurt so much that we are unable to hold their pain as well as our own.

As mothers, we are used to being the person who 'makes things better', the one who sorts things out. Fathers may feel they failed in their perceived role as provider and protector. We may each try to sort out the other's problems, rather than cling together and let ourselves grieve.

If our relationship was difficult before, it may get worse rather than better, at least in the short term. It may improve in the long term through our shared suffering, and growing understanding of each other's grief

Children born after the death of their brother or sister

Some of us may give birth to further children after our child has died. We may be surprised by how our feelings are interwoven, how the past death is also part of the new birth. Some mothers experience vivid flashbacks during pregnancy or labour.

Although we are looking forward to the birth of our new baby, we may find ourselves suffering extremes of anxiety and fear, our confidence is gone and we are full of doubt and worry. This can make the early weeks and months fraught and may make bonding with the new baby very difficult.

We know that we will be kept busy when our new baby arrives, and the tiredness from this will add to the weariness that the earlier bereavement has brought, but in some way the need for a new routine can help us and give a new structure to our days.

Sometimes friends and well wishers can be extraordinarily insensitive in thinking, and even saying, that the new baby will somehow wipe out the earlier loss, that everything will be 'all right' when we have a replacement. It is hard to have to explain that the new baby can never replace the child who has died. We welcome the new child as a blessing and a joy – but we welcome them for themselves, not as a substitute.

The way forward

We need to survive. We need to be there for our children, our partner, our family, for our friends and indeed for ourselves. If we are in the horrific position of being the only survivor, then perhaps we need to survive in order to bear witness to the fact that our child did live, that he or she was special, precious, loved.

Mothers do survive and there are some things that can help, with perhaps the most important one being that we recognise that the loss of our child is not something we are expected to bear alone; we need to let other people help us. Sometimes we are so locked into our motherhood role that we find this very difficult.

We fear that if we let ourselves go, weep with a friend, or even acknowledge to our children how much we hurt, then somehow we will lose the ability to cope at all.

But in truth it is not like that. At least in the early days of our bereavement, if we give ourselves space, let other people cook the meals, take our children to school, listen to us as we talk about our dead child, then we will gradually grow stronger and better able to carry on. Our children will benefit from the company of others, whether that is playing a game with friends or talking with someone they trust about what has happened.

Our partner needs space and time also; he may choose to spend time alone, perhaps pursuing leisure activities, or he may enjoy going to the pub, or he may spend long hours at work hoping to escape from the grief at home.

It is hard to recognise each individual's needs at this time, especially when these are very different. One of us may need professional advice while the other does not. Usually it helps to seek support from several sources.

We may be helped by the support offered in the local groups, through the wide range of leaflets, the website, the quarterly magazine, the Library, by telephone, email or letters. We each have to find our own way through our grief. Just as each child is special and different, so is each mother, and our pain when our child dies is unique to us, but we do not have to walk the path alone.

A Fathers grief

Many strong emotions are aroused in a family when a child dies; fathers feel the same emotions as mothers, but how we experience these, how we deal with and express them can differ greatly from how a mother grieves.

Grief shows itself in many forms including shock, despair, anger and guilt, and fathers and mothers alike face these. There is no set order for when they are felt; sometimes one feeling dominates all others. At times we may feel guilty because we have not thought of our grief for a while – we may even have laughed at something – or we may feel guilt simply because we are numb and seem to have lost all the expected emotions.

Problems start with expectations of ourselves and of others, as well as the presumptions of the people around us, over what is the 'correct' form for grief to take. It could be said that individuals, irrespective of gender, grieve differently, but traditionally expectations differ for women and men: women can cry in public, but men are expected to control themselves.

Sometimes as a grieving father, our own grief can become buried in family obligations. Yet as a person in our own right, we may periodically want space and quiet time alone, so that we might assimilate the enormity of what has happened.

We need to put our thoughts in some sort of order – or, at least, try to do so – and we should give ourselves the freedom to sob our heart out, perhaps in private, so as to break the dam of accumulated feelings.

How then are we going to cope with those around us? We are bombarded with strange and painful emotions. Some of our friends, neighbours, work colleagues and even some family members either avoid us, avoid any reference to our child who has died, or try to give advice on how we should be conducting ourselves. Faced with bereaved parents, phrases like 'Time heals' or 'You must be strong for your family' become familiar.

We may soon learn that we have to try to remain calm in such exchanges and hope that we were more careful with our words before our bereavement. As a bereaved father, it is not unusual to be asked 'And how is your wife?' Could this be a way of asking 'How are you coping with your grief?'

It would be unusual for a father and a mother always to be in the same mood, at the same intensity of grief. This can create problems when one partner feels the other is insensitive to his or her feelings. We will be reacting at different times and in different ways to various and complex emotions.

Often our child's mother is the strongest ally we have in surviving the loss of our child. She knows only too well what we are going through, and few others can give this understanding.

It is important to be aware that grief can be a wedge that may drive couples apart. Some marriages and relationships are broken by a child's death. Also today, many of us are part of a 'blended' family where a father and a mother, each with their own children, are now together in one household. There are some different problems to face in such circumstances, following the death of a child.

Our surviving children have lost their sibling and they need special care from us. We need to support and guide them in any way we can, according to their age, by including them when we talk about their dead brother or sister; sharing our thoughts about how each of us feels about ways of remembering him or her.

It is also important to recognize that we and our surviving children can gain strength and companionship through being with each other, without necessarily using words. Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and other religious festivals may be difficult for us, especially in the first year.

If we are on our own for any reason, we often face different worries, and we may have no close adult with whom we can share our pain. If in these circumstances we have children to look after, then everyday problems could include running the home, and holding down a job.

We may be compelled - or wish - to return to work soon after the funeral of our son or daughter. We feel that we must continue to provide for our family, and some of us may be fearful of losing our jobs. Sometimes the workplace can seem to be a 'retreat' from the pressures at home.

Sometimes we may find it impossible to go back to the same job. When added to all the emotions around the loss of a child, these things can be extremely stressful, tiring and draining.

If we are fortunate, our employers will allow us to ease back into our job, asking colleagues to take on some of our usual workload. Among those around us at work, there will be people who find us difficult to deal with; there will be expressions of sympathy, but also embarrassment, awkwardness and anxiety. If there is a highly competitive situation, there is added pressure to get back to full speed.

A quick return could also seem necessary if we are involved in a team project or work system, or if we are aware of and worried about our waiting customers.

Thankfully, there can be work colleagues who show much kindness even when we are not easy to be with. They are willing to listen to us when we feel a need to talk about our dead child, both in the early days of our return to work, and after much time has passed.

Some fathers do not go out to work. We may choose to work from home for at least some part of our employment. We may be unemployed, disabled or retired. Whatever the reason, we will be around the house for much of the day and this can bring other problems. There will be less opportunity to interact with other people.

Grief such as we face in losing a child can bring lethargy, tiredness, sleeplessness and illness. However, our physical well-being is often a great asset in dealing with the emotional and mental aspects of grief.

There can be much benefit from engaging in some form of physical exercise that leaves us tired and ready for sleep. At times we may feel that we have no energy to participate in such activity but if we push ourselves to do so, we can find relief from stress and feel better afterwards.

There should be no guilty feelings about resuming our former interest in some enjoyable leisure activities. But we may feel the need to rethink such things, sometimes choosing ones that give us space for ourselves alone, or sometimes preferring to share activities, perhaps with our partner (when that is possible), or with friends, especially those we have found to be supportive and understanding.

As the bereaved father, we may well have to deal with the formal requirements following the death of our child. If we are the next of kin of our adult son or daughter, we may be the one to carry out the complex and time-consuming legal formalities whether or not there is a Will. This is stressful and difficult and will most probably need a solicitor's involvement.

There are ways in which bereaved parents can find comfort after the death of a son or daughter. Many of us are helped by writing in the form of prose or poetry, about our deepest feelings or a particular memory.

It doesn't matter what we do with the writings afterwards, though keeping them can be quite revealing when looking back after a period of time. It is important that we are prepared for the reality that in the years ahead, there will still be occasions when we become choked with emotion and have eyes filled with tears.

TCF has group meetings in many areas and can put bereaved fathers in touch with each other, by telephone, visits, letter or email. There is a Menspace Group available to all men who have experienced the death of their son, daughter, brother, sister, grandson or granddaughter. Many bereaved men find that talking to others who have had similar experiences brings great comfort.

A Siblings grief

The death of a sibling

If our brother or sister dies when we are teenagers or young adults, we are able to understand our loss but not always able to grieve in the same way as adults; grief can be different for everybody so there is no right or wrong way to grieve.

We are old enough to think about the situation like adults but not necessarily able to choose our own way to grieve, even though we try to cope in the same way.

Sometimes, we might want comforting as if we were a child; at other times, we just want to be independent and cope on our own. Our grief may differ from that of others because of the individual relationship we had with our sibling

We have the problem of whom to turn to for support. We need comfort, understanding and sympathy from those around us but we are not always able to find these.

It is difficult to approach our parents when their own pain is so raw, and we might think that they are too burdened already to talk; we might think that our own emotions are not important enough compared with theirs, but in fact it can be very helpful to all concerned to discuss how we're feeling.

Sometimes we focus on relationships outside the family, but many of our friends may have never been in this situation to know how to deal with us, and we may even be looking for them to accept that we could be changing because of what's happened.

After the death

After our sibling has died we might be in shock, numb, in denial, and struggling to believe what has happened.

We may even want to join those we've lost or feel we're going crazy when we still expect our brother or sister to be near us; we may withdraw into ourselves. We can feel neglected by everyone; that only our parents' grief is important; or guilty that we are the surviving sibling.

It is a major event that can change the relationships within our families; for instance, we may now have become the eldest, the youngest or the only child.

Compensating after the death?

We can be exhausted when we use up energy by trying to appear 'normal'. Our bereavement can make us over-protective of any remaining siblings or of our parents; we can feel guilty about many different things, including any arguments we might have had with the sibling we have lost.

We might feel tired and restless, and have poor concentration, angry that our sibling has been taken from us, and we might be fearful for our own safety or for that of other members of our family.

These feelings are natural and we should not suppress them. Help and support can be obtained to deal with these issues instead of going through them alone.

Making choices?

Experience of death can teach us about life. We can learn to care about the things that are really important to us, learn about the things that matter in our lives.

It can force us to evaluate the choices we have to make and, maybe, to choose different options from those that our friends would select. We grow up, thinking we are learning about all the things we might have to deal with in our life, but we learn nothing about what we might have to face if a sibling dies.

Most people we will meet will not know how to deal with our loss, and they will often make comments that may seem cruel or uncaring, but this is more to do with their ignorance and fear of the unknown rather than through any willful desire to hurt.

Few people will understand the way losing a brother or sister can make us feel and it can be frustrating when people assume how we feel and what is important to us as a result of our loss.

Others won't even mention what we might be going through because they are not sure what to say; by explaining our feelings we can help them to understand more.

The empty space

We may want to fill the space that has been left by our sibling but may have to take care that we don't try to be like the brother or sister we've lost. We have to continue to be the person we want to be and learn from the type of person our sibling was.

Some of us feel the need to do as much as possible to make up for the things our sibling won't get to do, but it is important not to put unnecessary pressure on ourselves by trying to do too much.

It can be very hard to carry on with the 'pointless' everyday tasks such as going to school, college or work. Some might wonder why we should bother with work when it seems so unimportant in comparison with what has just happened.

Others may welcome the routine that this commitment offers; we like to keep something that we are sure of in our life. There may be times when we can go through periods when we feel we've taken a step backwards in our grieving process. When we feel that we've been coping and then something happens to make us doubt it, it can be scary.

How many siblings do I have?

When we move on from school to college or work we will undoubtedly be faced with the question, "How many brothers and sisters do you have?" It's not an easy question to answer. It sometimes feels inappropriate to go into the whole family story about how and when a sibling died, but it can also feel horrible to answer that question without mentioning the person we love and we've lost.

The answer can be different each time, but it will always make us pause for a moment.

Some schools and places of work have a counsellor or support system to help with our feelings of grief. In addition, there are organizations such as The Compassionate Friends (TCF) that have phone and email contacts (who may have gone through similar events) to listen and to talk with us. Schools and workplaces may also have an area that we can retreat to when we're having a hard day and are feeling low.

Forgetting

Some bereaved siblings experience a fear of forgetting the person they've lost. There are different ways to help keep the memory alive, and these include writing, perhaps letters or poetry, or a diary recording thoughts and remembrances.

We may also gather keepsakes for a memory box; photographs, of course; and music can be very evocative too. We can even help others by fundraising for a charity linked in some way to our brother or sister.

This could be related to something in their life, their job or a particular hobby or interest of theirs, or a charity involved in work connected with an illness or even with the cause of their death.

Volunteer work can be a way of helping not only others, but a way of helping ourselves by keeping us busy, allowing ourselves a break from feelings of despair, or as a way of encouraging us if we look back and fear we didn't give enough help to our sibling when he or she was alive.

Occasions

When we've lost a sibling there are special occasions that can be very distressing, both the anticipation and then the day itself. We can discuss with other members of the family and decide a way to spend the day.

It might be beneficial for us to carry out activities as a sign of remembrance, such as taking flowers to a special place, maybe releasing balloons, lighting a candle, or by spending some time at one of our sibling's favourite places.

We might choose to plant flowers, to listen to favourite songs or to spend time with others who knew our sibling. To mark the day in a special way can bring comfort. We may need time alone to give thought to how much our sibling meant and still means to us.

The legacy

As bereaved siblings, we can be happy to have had such special people touch our lives. The loss we feel will be overwhelming at times but with the support of others we can work through our grief and think of the person we've lost, and smile at the good times we shared.

A Grandparents grief

The death of our grandchild can overwhelm us with grief and have a profound and complex effect on us.

At the same time as being a grandparent, we are also a parent who is unable to protect our own child from the pain and desolation of bereavement as they in turn mourn the death of their son or daughter. This is a double burden, where helplessness and frustration can add to the pain of grief. We will most likely feel deep sorrow not only at the actual loss of the grandchild at whatever age, but also that an important link in the continuity of the family chain has been lost.

Over the past forty years or so, there have been radical changes in the structure of the nuclear family in our country. Working mothers, a more mobile population, increased divorce rates, and second marriages have all affected the nature of many family relationships, including that between grandparents and the grandchildren.

The intensity of our grief may be affected by how close the relationship was with our grandchild, and his or her parents. Sometimes, because of distance or circumstances, contact will have been limited, but we may still mourn intensely; we may also suffer the added burden of others not realising how much we are grieving and of our need to talk about our loss.

Following the initial shock, some of our physical reactions may be of weariness, of changes to appetite and sleep patterns. These reactions, and feelings of anxiety, lack of concentration and depression are common but not everybody will experience all of them. In addition, grief tends to come in waves, and without any pattern or predictability.

Helping ourselves

Many grandparents suffer feelings of guilt. One of the most powerful is survival guilt: that we are alive when others - much younger than us - have died. A grandparent may feel guilty about the things they did not do for, or with, their grandchild. Talking about these worries can help us as grandparents to realise that nobody is perfect and that each person does the best they can in the circumstances.

Anger may be another feeling that we experience. It is not always rational, but nevertheless it is there and needs to be faced. Anger is a strong emotion and may be directed at life, at God or at any individual person or authority we feel is responsible for the death of our grandchild.

It will help if the anger can be expressed safely, perhaps through physical activity or exercise, by talking to an understanding friend, or through writing. Such writing could be as a letter in which we pour out all the anger and frustration; once expressed, the letter can be destroyed.

Helping our child

The way our child expresses his or her grief may be different from our own and should be respected. It will not help them to be told what they should, or should not, be feeling, thinking, or doing. It will help if we can listen and empathise with them when they express their feelings of anger, anguish and despair. Emotional support at this time can be of great comfort.

If possible, grandparents could offer to help with the practical demands of family life, such as in the care of other grandchildren who will be grieving too, and who may be feeling very 'left out'.

Looking after any family pets, or perhaps doing a little work around the home, could relieve some of the pressures on our daughter or son; this could be especially so if our child is a single parent for whom those pressures might be greater.

Some people, especially men who feel more comfortable in the traditional role with the 'stiff upper lip' approach, have problems expressing their emotions, and sometimes find shared activities more helpful.

Whatever the circumstances, it is important to pace ourselves so that we do not get overtired. We need to cope with our own grief and to find time to replenish our energies.

If the relationship between us and our child has been difficult, it may not be easy to speak about our thoughts, and fears. Bereaved parents may find someone outside the immediate family, perhaps a trusted friend, in whom to confide. They may find comfort in speaking to another bereaved parent.

If our son or daughter is now childless, it may be helpful to know of the Childless Parents group within The Compassionate Friends (TCF). Through this organisation, it might be possible to make contact with others who have lost their only grandchild. This could perhaps bring some support and comfort especially where there is little or no prospect of another child of that generation.

Helping our other grandchildren

If there are surviving grandchildren in the bereaved family, we may find we are able to offer them much-needed stability, comfort and support, especially while the normal patterns of family life are disrupted and disorganised.

For both grandparents and grandchildren this will be a significant time, and new bonds might well be forged which could last a lifetime. It is important to recognise that we and our grandchildren can gain great strength and companionship through being with each other, sharing in activities even if not talking about our grief directly.

Brothers and sisters of the dead child will have many fears and worries at this time, varying according to their age and understanding. It is best to answer their questions as simply and honestly as possible, even though this is painful and difficult for them and for us.

Grandparents living at a distance will be able to help and comfort their child and grandchildren with letters, cards, phone calls and emails. It is important that the surviving grandchildren feel 'special', loved and valued at this time; grandparents are well placed to help in this way with messages that are personal to each child.

Family occasions

In the early years after the death of their child, our daughter or son will need our understanding at family occasions, when the absence of a much-loved child is felt especially acutely.

In later years, on birthdays, anniversaries, family weddings, or births, and with other deaths, recognition of the loss and the pain will be appreciated. (TCF's leaflet Coping with special occasions includes a number of suggestions to help the grieving family.)

Even ordinary dates such as when the child would have started school, gone to college or started work, can be emotional. Of course, as grandparents, we too can find our thoughts at such times painful, and perhaps a reminder of the sad 'if only's' that can change our lives.

Wherever possible and appropriate there can be much to gain from sharing our feelings and by being comfortable in leaning on each other.

"The Compassionate Friends is about transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope. It takes people out of the isolation society imposes on the bereaved and lets them express their grief naturally."
Simon Stephen, founder The Compassionate Friends

The Healing Process

Try to remember, when a child dies, an 'eternal flame' burns to their memory. You need to share stories about your child. Talk about your crushed dreams and hopes. Display photographs. Encourage children to express their feelings. Communicate your desire to talk to relatives, neighbours, friends. Often, they feel so helpless they don't know what to say or do. Teach them how to help you. If you choose the road of avoidance and escape from hurt, eventually you'll pay the price. You can't extinguish this eternal flame. It needs to burn in tribute to you and your child.

Be comforted by good memories, when a child dies, parents and siblings may be haunted by regrets and painful memories. Share your feelings of guilt and failure, but also realise that no-one is a perfect parent, brother or sister. Accept the fact that, all things considered, with no rehearsal for what you went through, you probably did the best you could. Take plenty of time to focus on the good memories. Tell 'remember when...' stories. Laugh, cry, celebrate what you received from your child. At first this will be painful because there is a big gap in your life and a significant change in the meaning of home. But, ultimately, sharing good memories soothes and heals.

Assume that what you feel and how you act is normal. The sooner you meet other bereaved parents and siblings, the quicker you will recognise that your feelings and behaviour are quite normal. You are not weird or strange or losing your mind. Beware of torturing yourself with negative feelings and attitudes. You are not weak, helpless, powerless, confused or out of control, you are perfectly normal, in a very abnormal situation. Don't feel guilty if you have a good day.

Be sensitive to the fact that people grieve differently. At a support group meeting, one young mother shared concern about her eleven-year-old daughter's failure to grieve after the death of her five-year-old brother. Gradually, the mother realised her daughter had been grieving. However, she had missed her daughter's communication of grief because she expected her daughter to grieve the same way as she did. The mother was more of a 'feeling 'type of person who needed to talk. Her daughter was more of a 'thinking' type of person who did a lot of reflecting before she talked. When she spoke, she summed up her thinking in one or two sentences. This was extremely frustrating to her mother, until she realised that her daughter's grief was different.

Why did it happen? For some people, healing comes through protesting why God (or life) could do something so unfair, so senseless, so meaningless. It is best to encourage such people to rage, to ask why. They are the victims of a great tragedy.

Share with those who have been there. Although a family may receive tremendous support from their minister, church, doctor, relatives, neighbours, school, this support is not enough. There is an overwhelming desire to talk to other bereaved parents. People who haven't been there really don't understand. They cannot imagine what it's like. No matter how caring they are, they're limited in the help they can provide. Only parents and siblings who've been there can help in this part of the healing process.

Take time for yourself and use time effectively. How you choose to use time is crucial. Even though you may feel guilty or may need to adjust your plans, it is all right to try to enjoy yourself in the midst of grief. Going out to dinner, taking a holiday, taking up sport, you need moments of exercise, fun, diversion in order to renew yourself for the many times when you miss your loved one so much.

Try to do something different. Take a job, it could be voluntary work. Keep a diary, write down exactly how you feel every day. Later you will read what you have written and realise just how much progress you have made. Join a class, learn something new. Try not to spend too much time on your own at home.

What happens at a Support Meeting

Meetings usually start with introductions which include sharing something about the child who has died – to get to know each other better it is important to speak of the child who was lost and to talk about the death – most importantly this allows parents to share their grief. The Compassionate Friends do not focus morbidly on death – we are there to deal with the feelings and problems of parents, and family members, who must go on with their lives after the funeral, but we do understand that 'having loved... we grieve'. The ability and willingness to share the pain is an important part of the healing process.

At every support meeting, there are parents who have worked through their grief. These people provide caring, support and hope for parents who are still working through their individual grief. They share their struggles for adjustment and the problems faced and resolved. Although they are 'healed' they still remember their own dead children and do not avoid speaking about the reality of death, their own feelings and their painful memories. But they also talk about the things that they have achieved and the activities that gave them hope and helped them to work through their own grief.

The Compassionate Friends offer support groups and activities for bereaved siblings, the brothers and sisters of the deceased child, these surviving children are often the forgotten grievers. They also need understanding and support to work through their grief, and to understand and navigate their parents' grief.

Bereaved parents need support and understanding, they need time for healing and growth, the need is real and each year more Chapters of The Compassionate Friends are forming and growing. To ensure that members are not alone when they can't get to meetings there is an extensive telephone network of members throughout the State – these telephone contacts mean that help is always on hand. The Compassionate Friends also offers online support meetings and one to one support sessions.

The relationships between members of the family change with the death of a child as individuals handle the loss in their own way. Understanding the changes and dealing with the feelings involved is the key to surviving potentially destructive emotions and gaining strength from the experience.

At our support meetings, we warmly welcome you and recognise the fact that it is difficult to make the first step in coming. We try to make you feel at ease. We know that it is hard for you to mention your child's name or the circumstances of their death.

Some people attend meetings several times and do not enter into any discussions or voice their feelings. They absorb some ideas and discard others that do not meet their immediate needs. Inevitably, someone in the group will say something that is tuned into the exact way we are feeling – then the realisation hits that one is among friends who really understand and care about us and our feelings.

Some people are more vocal right from the start and they find willing listeners who neither criticise or pass judgement on them. We most likely have had the same feelings of anger, despair, longing, panic and a multitude of others

Now a word about crying. Please don't stay away because you are afraid you will cry! We have all cried, many times, and will do so again. Perhaps we have attended several meetings and not shed a tear. Then, something is said, or a memory comes back that brings a tear to our eyes.

Compassionate Friends can accept the gamut of feelings from tears to laughter. Laughter? Of course! We are, after all, human, and our emotions are many and varied. There are humorous things that come up in everyday living and thankfully, we are able to see that humour and enjoy it. If we can accept each other's feelings, it must include all ranges of emotions.

In the course of discussions, you may hear the answer to a question or problem that has been plaguing you. Several parents may tell how they handled the question of what to do with their child's belongings, clothes, toys, books etc; or how they have got through the holidays, birthdays, and other difficult days. Maybe you will pick up something that will be helpful in dealing with your surviving children's problems; how to deal with a seemingly caring relative or friend, the hurtful remarks, or how to answer the question, "How many children do you have?"

Sometimes, what has helped one may not have worked for another, but the importance is the open and honest discussions and a chance to decide for yourself.

Grief is normal. It means that you have loved. It is the necessary process by which we adjust our lives to the absence of our loved one. The Compassionate Friends support meetings are not wallowing in grief. We encourage you to work with your grief, to help you adjust to your new situation.

Good mental health is not the denial of loss but learning how to work with it. We hurt, but we work at being healed.

The Compassionate Friends now operates in 50 countries. It is a worldwide self-help organisation, offering support, friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and their surviving children.

The purpose is to promote and aid

parents in the positive resolution of the grief upon the death of their child, and to foster the physical and emotional health of parents and bereaved siblings.

One final word about The Compassionate Friends:

We are not the one and only answer to dealing with grief. We are but one resource, and are not in competition with God, churches, friends, family or counsellors.

We can all work together to heal.

The Compassionate Friends provides an atmosphere of acceptance, also listeners who have been there and understand.

Remember! YOU ARE NOT ALONE !

The Compassionate Friends Queensland relies heavily on donations, like most non-profit organisations, to cover the everyday running costs of the organisation in supporting bereaved parents and their families.

Sadly, the need for the work of our organisation continues and indeed is increasing, and all money raised will enable us to continue our support to these bereaved families.

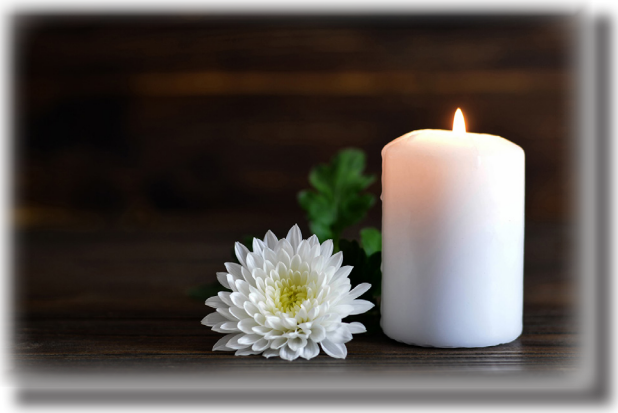
Please consider donating to help support our organisation so we may continue to care and support the many families who face the most devastating loss of all..... the loss of a child.

Donations can be made:

Online at via our website

Cheque or money order made out to:
The Compassionate Friends QLD

Electronic bank transfer:
BSB: 484 799
ACC No: 506 124 003
Donations are tax deductible.



At The Compassionate Friends Queensland we offer:

24hrs phone support
monthly support meetings
monthly zoom support meetings
monthly sibling support meetings
one-to-one support
drop-in centre
regular gatherings
quarterly magazine
monthly podcast

For the most up-to-date information on all our services please contact us via

Website:
www.compassionatefriendsqld.org.au
24 hour National Support Line:
1300 064 068

Address:
44 Newdegate Street,
Greenslopes, QLD 4120

Email:
admin@tcfqld.org.au

Facebook:
https://www.facebook.com/
thecompassionatefriendsqld

Podcast:
https://true-grief.captivate.fm/