

When a Child Dies The Compassionate Friends Can Help

When a child dies, families mourn and begin the process of bereavement. Bereaved families experience many different feelings—disbelief, sadness, loneliness, fear, anger, regret, guilt, despair and personal loss. These feelings are all a part of the emotional reaction called “grief.” Sometimes feelings of grief may be overwhelmingly intense. Some people tend to keep feelings inside, while others are able to express their grief easily and openly.

The Compassionate Friends is open to all families who have experienced the death of a child from any cause, at any age. The term “member” is used loosely in TCF—there are no membership dues or individual fees of any kind.

TCF is funded by voluntary gifts from individuals, as well as donations from the business and philanthropic communities. Since TCF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, donations are tax-deductible. The Compassionate Friends has no religious affiliation, although local chapters do sometimes meet in donated church facilities.

**We need not walk alone
we are the Compassionate
Friends.**

The Compassionate Friends was founded in England in 1969 by Reverend Simon Stephens, then an assistant chaplain at the Coventry and Warwickshire Hospital. Through the deaths of two young boys at the hospital, their parents met, and a meaningful friendship developed.

The first TCF chapter in the United States was organized in Miami, Florida in 1972. The Compassionate Friends was incorporated in 1978 as a not-for-profit organization. Today there are local chapters in approximately 600 communities throughout the country.

For over twenty-eight years, The Ocean County Chapter of the Compassionate Friends has been helping families toward the positive resolution of their grief following the death of a child. Founded by Barbara Selikoff after the death of her three year old daughter, Laura Ann, the chapter has met and published a newsletter monthly since December 1977.

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When a Child Dies . . . The Compassionate Friends Can Help

The Compassionate Friends is an international self-help group which offers friendship and understanding to families who are grieving the death of a child of any age, from any cause. There is no religious affiliation and there are no membership fees or dues. All bereaved family members are welcome.

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

The vision of The Compassionate Friends is that everyone who needs us will find us and everyone who finds us will be helped.

Ocean County Chapter Meetings

The Chapter meets 7:30PM on the first Tuesday of each month. We also meet on the third Sunday of the month at 2:00PM and special meetings are held during the year on specific topics related to grieving. Meetings are at the Children's Memorial Garden, Winding River Park, Toms River and can be reached from the Oak Ridge Parkway entrance to Winding River Park (near the skating center and the armory).

The Chapter Meeting

Grief, with its many peaks and valleys, lasts far longer than society in general recognizes. When your child dies, grief is not over in a week, a month, or even a year. Expectations others may have of you should not be a guideline for your own progress. Be patient with yourself. You've been through a lot.

Sharing with others is the very heart of TCF. Chapter meetings are havens where members feel free to talk about their children who have died; the emotions they are going through; the painful, thoughtless comments that may have been made to them; their feelings of sadness, guilt or anger—things no one else wants to hear them talk about. They discuss the progress they are making and ways of coping that have been helpful to them. No one is obligated to speak and you may bring someone with you for support. Aunts, uncles, grandparents and siblings are welcome to attend.

With the guidance and reassurance of members who are further along in their grief journey, gradually—sometimes over a period of many months or several years—they resolve what has happened, find a “new normal” and begin rebuilding their lives.

The Compassionate Friends is not a therapy group, nor are chapter meetings “therapy” sessions. Yet, healing is slowly and gently promoted as families gain insight and understanding. At chapter meetings we learn that we are not alone in facing this terrible tragedy—others have also faced the isolation and desperation this loss can bring.

Families who have felt they were coping effectively with their loss, as well as those who are discouraged by their lack of progress, have found attending meetings to be helpful. While there are no instant solutions, no easy answers, and no timetable for grieving, there is comfort in the sense of direction found through knowledge and understanding of the grief experience. Bereaved families can find hope and healing.

Lending Library

A library of grief related books and tapes are available at each meeting and may be borrowed for home reading between meetings. Brochures on various aspects of grief and handouts are also available.

Our Chapter Newsletter

The Chapter publishes a monthly newsletter to keep members informed, to remember the anniversaries of our children and to publish articles, poems and prose that address bereavement issues. You can register for the newsletter on our website: www.OceanTCF.com. If you do not use the internet, call or write the chapter and leave your name and address. We will be happy to add you to our mailing list.

Children's Memorial Garden

The Ocean County Chapter maintains a memorial garden located in Winding River Park, Toms River. The property, a gift of the Township of Dover was dedicated in 2005 and is in memory of all the children of the county that have died. Built with contributions from the community and members, the garden contains plantings, benches, a gazebo and sculpture, and includes a paved walkway overlooking a pond.

Candle Lighting Service

Each year on the second Sunday of December at 7:00PM the chapter holds a candle lighting remembrance service and observes National Children's Memorial Day by taking part in TCF'S annual Worldwide Candle Lighting. At 7:00PM in every time zone, candles are lit in honor of all children who have died creating a virtual wave of light around the globe.