

HeartLights

The newsletter of The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter

Spring 2017

“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. With the shedding of tears, healing comes. And the newly bereaved get to see people who have survived and are learning to live and love again.”

—Simon Stephens,
founder of
The Compassionate
Friends



The
Compassionate Friends
Foothills Chapter

Letter from the Editor

Not really knowing where to start, I Googled grief and self-care. I found some helpful ideas at www.grief-watch.com. When our son died, I wasn't thinking about me. My heart was broken and nothing would change that...or so I thought. I think of Russ every day, but have learned that taking care of myself does matter and enables me to face my grief and gives me energy to participate in my life. I didn't do all (or any)

of the following at first, but I do urge that you consider some of these suggestions. Listen to your body, get rest, sleep, and eat. Think about exercise — maybe, take a short daily walk. Lower expectations for yourself — no one can participate at full tilt after the death of a child. Consider keeping a journal. Be aware of the reactions of others. Not everyone experiences grief or death the same way, but don't hesitate to let others know when they say something inappropriate. You may not feel that when "...God closes a door, he opens a window." If you need counseling or support, get it. How



remember your child's birthday, walk with you, sit with you at church, to remember how difficult holidays are for bereaved parents, and to be a physical presence.

As we grieve, it is important to remember to take care of ourselves. Remember that grief comes in waves and keeps its own schedule. Rested and nourished we are stronger and better able to cope. With support from friends, family and other bereaved parents, we can work toward reconciliation. Please join us at The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter. You don't have to grieve alone.

—by Betty McBrayer

will you know? Maybe someone has said they are worried about you (maybe you're worried about you); or, you've withdrawn from friends, family, and activities you enjoyed up until now. Don't hesitate to contact a professional if you have feelings of hopeless or you are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

When someone asks "What can I do?" tell them. It helps to have your child remembered. Ask caring friends to call,

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- **Monday, April 24** – The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter meeting, 6:30 p.m. in the Blount Memorial Hospital auditorium
- **Monday, May 22** – The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter meeting, 6:30 p.m. in the Blount Memorial Hospital auditorium
- **Monday, June 26** – The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter meeting, 6:30 p.m. in the Blount Memorial Hospital auditorium

“Well has it been said that there is no grief like the grief which does not speak.”

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Mission

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

The Compassionate Friends is a national non-profit, self-help support organization that offers friendship, understanding and hope to bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. There is no religious affiliation, and there are no membership dues or fees.

The **secret** of The Compassionate Friends is simple. As seasoned grievers reach out to the newly bereaved, energy that has been directed inward begins to flow outward, and both are helped to heal.

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

Barbara Lasater – professional advisor
Cindy Turner – outreach coordinator
Betty McBrayer – newsletter coordinator

The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter appreciates the support of our community. There is no cost to participate in the chapter's activities, though donations always are welcome.

For more information about The Compassionate Friends, visit www.compassionatefriends.org.

Contact Us

If you have questions about The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter or would like to submit information for the next newsletter, call 865-984-4223, e-mail tc foothills@bmnnet.com or mail to The Compassionate Friends Foothills Chapter, c/o Blount Memorial Counseling and CONCERN, 262 Cherokee Professional Park, Maryville, TN 37804.

Counselor's Corner

"Giving up Living and Loving is not a fitting memorial to love."

—Judy Tatelbaum, *"The Courage to Grieve"*

How can I "Live" again when my world has turned upside down by the loss of my child? This is an understandable question after the most devastating loss a parent can experience. Learning to live again begins with self-care at a time when you do not feel like you care about anything anymore. In fact, you feel numb and flat and are likely functioning on autopilot.

So, how do I take steps toward self-care? The first suggestion is to listen to your internal voice that will guide you regarding what you need. This is not a time to worry about other people's needs or feeling that you "should" or "should not" do or feel a certain way. The loss of a child is an emotional shock as well as a physical shock as both mind and body are impacted.

Let's focus on the body first. The two most important areas to attend are the two most difficult: sleep and nutrition. When people are experiencing extreme grief and stress it is very difficult to sleep or eat. Sleeping will likely be disrupted and in spurts. Recognize that this is normal, but try to allow yourself space to sleep even if that means multiple naps per day. When we do not sleep well, we cannot focus and we have difficulty making decisions. Good nutrition is another challenge. You are likely to have a minimal appetite or no appetite. Do your best to eat even small amounts spread throughout the day. It may be helpful to start with bland items such as crackers, soup, toast or yogurt. Just like with a lack of sleep, a lack of nutrition will continue

to deplete you and can set you up for health consequences. If it is possible, get a massage to help your body relax. Although difficult to put one foot in front of the other, a short walk can help your body be more receptive to food and sleep.

Emotional support is pivotal at this time. Tell your family and friends what you need from them, and allow yourself to ask for help. Having family and friends to hug and be near can be a source of comfort without a need for words. It is important that you give yourself permission to express your emotions whether it is tears, anger, or laughter. You must be patient with

yourself, and pay attention to whether you are giving yourself discouraging or encouraging messages. Focus on what you do have a choice about which will give you a small sense of some control in a situation that is beyond your control. You may need to reset your priorities so that you can eliminate unnecessary stress and allow others to take over. Choose who you wish to be around, and don't hold yourself to other's expectations. Boundaries are important at this time, and you do not need to lose energy taking care of other people's feelings or needs.

A very helpful activity is to schedule "grief time." During that time you can make an appointment with yourself and set a timer for about 45 minutes where you will allow yourself the space to grieve. This is a good time to look at pictures or memorabilia, play music, or just sob. It is a safe time to protect

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Those Who Know

The circle forms as each walks in.
Our monthly meeting gathers again.
Sorry for the reason we are all here.
And grateful for an understanding ear.

We say our name and that of our child.
Share circumstances beyond our control.
At first — so hard to think and then talk.
Don't want to be here. Turn back the clock.

Deep grief, raw pain, all come seeking why?
Many ask why their child had to die?
The answer, we learn, is not to be found.
A simple question, and yet so profound.

Inconceivable loss. Why did we not know
Our child could die before we could go?
Sitting together, we are Those Who Know.
Understanding your cry — “How can it be so?”

Here you'll find others among Those Who
Know.
Navigating life broken — no longer whole.
As the amputee learns to move without limb,
We will help you to start living again.

As years go by, meetings come and go.
From our loss of many more we now know.
Zach, Jessie, Sean, Kyle, Kevin and Ron
Different ages and causes, but all now gone.

Lee, Steve, Sandy, Chase, McCaleb, and Jeff,
You guide us in helping those new to this
test.

In remembering you we give what we can,
Believing that, someday, we'll you again.

The meeting helped us and we're here again,
As new bereaved parents in a fog, walk in.
We are living proof that you will survive.
We are Those Who Know — our children
have died.

—by Georgia Cockerham

Healing Grief through Relaxation and Meditation – How Yoga Can Help

—An excerpt from an article by Coralease Ruff, PhD, RN

Yoga is not a religion. There is no religious doctrine or dogma practiced in yoga. However, yoga may be practiced in some religions. Yoga means union. We grieving parents need union and connection because we feel broken into a million pieces. Generally speaking, yoga is a physical practice that connects our body, mind and spirit into an integrated whole person. Yoga consists of physical exercises (asanas) to release muscle tension, breathing techniques (pranayama) to calm the stress response, and meditation for deep relaxation. This entire practice of yoga helps promote mind, body and spirit healing.

Research has documented that yoga increases strength, flexibility, and balance; enhances immune function; lowers blood sugar and cholesterol levels; and improves psychological well-being. One of yoga's most prominent effects is stress reduction.

Yoga is amazing. Even if practiced only once or twice a week, it will produce tremendous benefits. More practice produces more benefits. I suggest starting with two or three times a week, for 20 to 30 minutes. Even five to 10 minutes a



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day are beneficial. As a word of caution, you are unlikely to notice any big difference right away. The effects tend to be more subtle, but they will come.

Here is a brief overview of how yoga works in grief.

■ **First the breath**, essential to yoga practice, is critically important during grief because we unconsciously hold our breath and/or take fast shallow breaths. The slow deep breathing of yoga extinguishes the fight or flight response and calms the body and mind.

■ **The poses (asanas)** provide gentle stretching which helps us feel where the tension and tightness are located, release it, and increase flexibility and strength.

■ **Mindful meditation** helps us stay in the present—rather than dwelling on past regrets of “I wish I had,” or “If only.” It also stops us from worrying about the future, of which we have no control. Living in the present moment makes us aware of our pain and sparks compassion to soothe our pain.

These three processes work together to enable us to identify and cope with what we are feeling and experiencing in our grief. This process slowly facilitates healing grief.

Healing Through Arts and Crafts

—An excerpt from an article by Gail Lafferty and Kathy Rambo



Each of us grieving the loss of a child, grandchild or sibling discovers ways that help us face our pain, deal with it and try to heal. We are all different in how and when we do this and there are no timetables.

Some find that reading and learning more about grief is most helpful, others find that talking about grief and sharing their loss with others is most helpful. For some of us, we have found that working with our hands and feeling the fabric of our child's shirt, handling the buttons on the shirt or the softness of their blanket connects us with our loved one in a very special way.

We are Kathy and Gail, two bereaved moms who have found that working with crafts and sewing projects has been helpful and healing in remembering our sons.

Chapter Craft Day: Since Chapter members were asking for more than one Chapter meeting, we started a "Craft Day" in 2007 as an

additional meeting one Saturday each month. We started by using some of our ideas to make memory projects and soon members were bringing ideas to the group as well. Our Craft Days became a very healing experience for all of us as we made beautiful items out of clothing, blankets, pictures, buttons and trinkets.

Crafty Corner: A new experience at the National Conference this year was the Creative Cafe, which included the two of us creating and leading the "Crafty Corner." Attendees could make a craft in memory of their child using the supplies provided.

We recently worked with the National Office to launch Crafty Corner as a new closed Facebook page. This page will allow those interested in sharing ideas and learning new ways to create memory items a place to connect.

If you would like to join our Facebook page, please send a request to: **TCF – Crafty Corner.**

Hold Me

I want to cry.
Just some time, let me cry.
Do not demand
That constant smile from
me.

I know you are
Uneasy with my tears.
I need to cry.
Please, do not turn away.

I promise you
That I will smile again.
Tomorrow I
Will be as light as air.

But hold me now
And let my sorrow be,
Just for today,
This moment: let me cry.

—by Sascha Wagner



Counselor's Corner, cont. from pg. 2

yourself from distractions and just "be." You may choose to journal what gifts your life gave to your loved one and what gifts of their life they gave to you. You can journal all of the feelings you have had today: sadness, nausea, anger, rage, guilt, disbelief, loneliness, etc. You can write about a particular memory you have of your loved one and go into detail. Over time you can write about how you have helped yourself, emotionally, physically, or spiritu-

ally. You may want to write a letter to God and allow yourself to express your anger, sadness and fear.

Grief work takes much time and energy so please be patient with yourself. Do not judge how you are grieving or compare yourself to others. Grief is a process, and each person has different ways of walking through the pain. Support groups can be pivotal as only another parent who has lost a child can truly understand the depth of your

grief. If you have a Spiritual connection, much comfort can be received through the support of your community. It is important that you do not isolate yourself but remain open to others who wish to extend their hearts to you. Be open to expressions of love. Love never goes away.

—Lauren Passarello, Ph.D., LMFT,
Counselor, Blount Memorial
Counseling and CONCERN