



November-December 2023

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS-CHAPTER 2358

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Facebook Page: *Compassionate Friends of
Charlotte, NC*

MONTHLY MEETING

Meeting place: St. Matthew Catholic Church, 8015 Ballantyne Commons Parkway, Charlotte, NC - Room 234-235

Meeting Time: 3rd Tuesday of Each Month at 7:00 pm

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Monthly meetings: Nov. 21, 2023
Dec. 19, 2023

Annual worldwide candle lighting ceremony
Dec.10, 2023
St Matthews Chapel
Please arrive at 6:30

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

WELCOME & Chapter Info.....2

Donations & Chapter needs.....3

**Remembering our children’s birthdays
and angel dates.....4**

When Words Become Gifts.....8

Christmas Past, Christmas Present.....10

**24 Ways to Survive Christmas When
You’re Grieving.....12**

**T’was the Night Before Christmas for
Bereaved Parents.....17**

**7Ways to Help Grieving Children During
the Holidays.....18**

Chili Festival.....20

REGIONAL COORDINATOR

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NATIONAL OFFICE

The Compassionate Friends
(877-969-0010)

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www.compassionatefriends.org

online private closed facebook pages:

<https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/>

TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS!!

We congratulate you on having the courage to walk through our door for the first time. Please give our meetings at least 3 tries before deciding if they are right for you. We hope, with the resources available through TCF, you will find the right person or the right words to help you. You Need Not Walk Alone, We Are The Compassionate Friends.

TO OUR SEASONED MEMBERS:

We need your encouragement and support. TCF continues because of YOU. You give hope to the newly bereaved - hope that they too can eventually find joy in life again. Please attend when you feel you are able to reach out to another bereaved parent, grandparent or sibling.

Did you know that TCF Charlotte has its own Facebook page? Just search in facebook groups for - Compassionate Friends of Charlotte, NC

LIKE our Facebook page and please post any article, quote or personal musings that you feel may help another member. All information for meetings and special events will be listed on our facebook page.

PLEASE VISIT US ON OUR WEBPAGE!!

WWW.CHARLOTTETCF.ORG

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE PART OF TCF CHARLOTTE STEERING COMMITTEE?

We need your help. Volunteering to be on our Steering Committee is a wonderful way to give back to the organization that helped you when you were starting your grief journey, and what better way to keep your child, grandchild or sibling's memory alive? Contact any of the leaders at our meetings if you would like more information. We need YOUR help to ensure our Chapter is as successful as possible in helping others. This is YOUR Chapter - help us make it a welcoming and caring place for bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings to come to for help.

Our Chapter survives by donations only. There are costs associated with the Chapter, i.e., supplies, books, refreshments, food and supplies for our annual events, and our fee for our website. PLEASE help support our Chapter!!! Please consider donating to your Chapter in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling on their special days or during the holidays. What better thing to do in their memory than to pay it forward for the help you have received from TCF.

You can also help your chapter by being a Steering Committee Member. Just contact one of our chapter leaders. We have lots of different areas that we need help in.

Please Mail All Donations to Our TCF Charlotte Treasurer at The
Following Address:
Carolyn Patton
5902 Rimerton Drive
Charlotte, NC 28226-8227

WORLDWIDE CANDLE LIGHTING MEMORIAL SERVICE

The Compassionate Friends Worldwide Candle Lighting on the 2nd Sunday in December unites family and friends around the globe in lighting candles for one hour to honor the memories of the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, and grandchildren who left too soon. As candles are lit on December 10th, 2023 at 7:00 pm local time, hundreds of thousands of people commemorate and honor the memory of all children gone too soon.

Now believed to be the largest mass candle lighting on the globe, the annual Worldwide Candle Lighting (WCL), a gift to the bereavement community from The Compassionate Friends, creates a virtual 24-hour wave of light as it moves from time zone to time zone. TCF's WCL started in the United States in 1997 as a small internet observance and has since swelled in numbers as word has spread throughout the world of the remembrance. Hundreds of formal candle lighting events are held, and thousands of informal candle lightings are conducted in homes, as families gather in quiet remembrance of children who have died and will never be forgotten.

The Charlotte Chapter of TCF will host our annual candle lighting event on Dec 10, 2023 in St. Matthew's Catholic Church chapel. This will be followed by a potluck dinner and social gathering in the social hall. Please bring a dish or dessert to share and a photo of your child/grandchild/sibling. We will also have a table to display photos of your children so please, bring lots of pictures. We encourage you to invite family members and friends.

TO OUR MEMBERS

If there are any errors in dates or names in our listing of our children's, grandchildren's or sibling's, please let me know. We are trying to get our database as accurate as possible. Many of our loved ones names do not have a last name listed. In these cases, we assume it is the same as the parent, grandparent or sibling who is listed as a member in our database. If this is incorrect, please let me know. There are many names that do not have a birth date or a death date listed. We know this can be very difficult to list, especially in the early days of grief. If you feel like adding those dates, just email them to me at: fletcher1mom@gmail.com. We are only human so we do make mistakes, but I have tried to be as accurate as I possibly can. Thank you for understanding.

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR BIRTHDAYS - NOVEMBER

Justin Ferdinand	11/25
Michelle DiBernardini	11/19
Tim Boyer	11/22
Nolan Brantley	11/18
Colleen Louise Brooks	11/15
Xavier Brown	11/1
Dylan Burke Hahn	11/24
Eric Carlson	11/19
Joseph Canterino	11/24
Trenton James Scott	11/15
Anderson Fairley	11/20
John Cory Foil	11/9
Josselyn Giebeler	11/4
Caitlin Taylor Patton	11/14
Diana Phillipi	11/19
Ian Christian Lampkin	11/27
Tommy Ishee	11/1
Christopher Lloyd	11/22
Morgan Madsen	11/21
Michael Mahoney	11/23
Cory S. Flynt	11/29
Ryan Monfeli	11/15
James O'Keefe	11/6
Kyle Bodord	11/10
Justin Zuk	11/25
Matthew Lee Puckett	11/2
Hannah Quinton	11/11
Tim Roddey	11/14
Sadie Schuster	11/14
Loren Silva	11/9
Bill Twaddell	11/30
Kennedy Troutman	11/24

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR ANGEL DAYS - NOVEMBER

Stephen Benish	11/28
Michael Rodas	11/12
Joseph Canterino	11/24
Brian Courtemanchie	11/9
Lauren Ehele	11/30
John Cory Foil	11/9
Madelynn Charlotte Golbach	11/2
Puneet Golani	11/20
David Haney	11/24
Garrett Howison	11/21
Matthew Jackson	11/3
Ian Christian Lampkin	11/27
Chad Langdon	11/27
Morgan Madsen	11/21
Anthony Mclain	11/12
Jeana Norton	11/3
Billy Patton	11/11
Kiara Pearse	11/14
Jameel Pearse	11/14
Matthew Lee Puckett	11/16
Michael Schexnayder	11/9
Amaani Ariana Shah	11/14
Greg Moore	11/8
Shamar Sheats	11/15
Jeremy Sprague	11/30
Bill Twaddell	11/17
Kennedy Troutman	11/25

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR BIRTHDAYS - DECEMBER

Ayanna Addison	12/8
Lewis Addison	12/8
Christopher Brown	12/9
Nicholas Daniel	12/4
Creed Campbell	12/3
Thaddeus Cash	12/10
Luna Eve Hobbs	12/20
Kendall Hope	12/10
Tommy Horton	12/23
Isaiah Pinkney	12/31
Brian Michael Kirchner	12/3
Chad Langdon	12/22
Hannah Strickland	12/6
Michael McKinley	12/23
Lance Ferguson	12/21
Kelsey Morris	12/4
Eric Lemarier	12/12
Adam Mashburn	12/22
Jason Christopher Roberts	12/7
Silje Rowell	12/27
Abigail Sadowski	12/20
Heath Graves	12/28
Nicholas Simonette	12/15
Matthew Wright	12/30
Billy Trahey	12/25
Greg Vitiello	12/5
Jason Walters	12/10
Denis Anthony Giacobbe	12/31
Angela Harper	12/15
Lindsay N. Jerdo	12/16
Jonathan Holt Whitlow	12/26
James Davis Whitten	12/1
Amanda Jen Ziegler	12/28
Bryan Andrew Dingess	12/6

REMEMBERING THESE CHILDREN ON THEIR ANGEL DAYS - DECEMBER

Cory Abernathy	12/1
John Joseph Gabriel Jr.	12/12
Vincent Chandler Edmond	12/13
Jennifer Eanes	12/12
Yasmine Anderson	12/16
Christopher Hall	12/25
Luna Eve Hobbs	12/20
Ashley Hurte	12/22
Jeremy Jenkins	12/7
Jasmine D. Thar	12/23
Ryan Monfeli	12/30
Ayriel E. Moore	12/6
Brian David Palmer	12/4
Malik Robinson	12/29
Tim Roddey	12/31
Abigail Sadowski	12/4
Sadie Schuster	12/7
Nicholas Simonette	12/29
Chris Taylor	12/10
Kekoa Teonkina	12/17
Lindsay N. Jerdo	12/24
Jason Lucas Armstrong	12/25
Jamaal Miller	12/14
Jack Altieri	12/6
Savanna Eastwood	12/17
James Lovell	12/22

When Words Become Gifts

On Thanksgiving Day, 1994, two of my three young adult sons, Erik and David, were killed in a freak car accident. Years after the accident, my husband and I were at David's college alma mater for a holiday event. I was in the dessert line when a woman came up to me and said, "I saw your name tag—are you David Aasen's mom?" After doing a double take (it had been some time since I had been asked what used to be a rather common question), I replied with much appreciation, "Yes, I am!" With those three, almost magical, words this person gave me five gifts.

Her first gift was saying David's name. Instead of just thinking to herself, Hmmm, I bet that's David Aasen's mom but I better not say anything, she said something. Her second gift was sharing a story with me about how her daughter, a classmate of David's, still treasures the friendship she and David shared. Acknowledging that I'm still a mom was her all-important third gift. While my sons' deaths have resulted in my becoming a bereaved mother, death cannot take away the fact that I am, and always will be, Erik and David's mom.

The fourth gift was permission to share a bit of my grief journey with her. Since their deaths, I explained, there haven't been any truly easy, carefree, feeling-on-top-of-the-world days, but taking each day as it comes has been the most "doable" way for me to go on. Her questions and manner did not make me feel obligated to cover up my grief and was the fifth gift. I felt valued for my honesty and my integrity remained intact.

The warmth of those five gifts has lingered on in my heart and has comforted me. As I reflect on the experience, I marvel at how just a few simple words had such an impact. I have come to the conclusion that most bereaved parents want nothing more than the opportunity to talk comfortably with others about their children. Just being able to share stories about our sons and daughters in a safe place, along with the permission to mourn in our own way and for as long as we need to, even for a lifetime, is what matters most to us.

The real treasure comes when others introduce our children's names and stories into an everyday conversation. Knowing our sons and daughters are remembered and live on in the hearts and lives of others is a measure of the meaningful legacy that our sons and daughters have left to us and to the world.

Nita Aasen

In memory of my sons, Erik and David Aasen
St. Peter, Minnesota

THANKSGIVING

November: Cool days, chilly nights, autumn leaves changing colors, football games, apple cider and pumpkin pie. Ah. November! . . . Is it November already? Oh, no! Make it go away! Just let me sleep; wake me up in January. November is here, the start of the holiday season.

This is the time of year most bereaved parents dread. This is the time of year when thoughts turn to spending time with family and friends and celebrating. Holiday decorations start popping up everywhere you turn and holiday music begins to play at the malls and on the radio. People are busy cleaning their home, and are all abuzz with getting ready for. . . Oh, no! Thanksgiving!

Everyone is asking what are you doing for Thanksgiving?" For the bereaved parent, especially the newly bereaved, this question can become daunting and almost horrifying. What am I doing for Thanksgiving?

Thanksgiving - giving thanks. But I don't feel very thankful.
How can I be thankful, when my child lives no more?
How can I be thankful, when he/she will never again walk through my front door?
How can I be thankful, when my eyes are filled with tears?
How can I be thankful, when he/she won't be here throughout the years?
How can I be thankful, when my heart will never mend?
How can I be thankful, when I've lost my dearest friend?
How can I be thankful, when his/her hugs and kisses have now ceased?
How can I be thankful, and sit down to a feast?
How can I be thankful, when my heart is filled with sorrow?
How can I be thankful, when I can hardly make it to tomorrow?

What do you answer? What will you do this year? For some, the choice is to keep the same tradition they have in the past. Others choose to remain home and ignore the holiday completely.

There are parents who go on vacation or go out to Thanksgiving dinner at a restaurant. Newly bereaved parents may question "what am I supposed to do?" There is no standard right or wrong answer. Whatever feels the most comforting is the right answer for you. Family members or friends might disagree with your decision and say you are wrong. This often happens if you decide to break tradition, want to be alone, or decide not to celebrate at all. People can become very insistent, and tell you that Thanksgiving is about being with others. I have found that my choice has varied over the years from choosing to be alone and not acknowledge the holiday at all; to going to friends' and family members' homes; to just having dinner at home and when asked, I say, "I know that you may not like my answer, but still. I need to do what is best for me."

However you decide to spend this Thanksgiving, please remember that for however short or long your precious, awesome, amazing, wonderful child was with you here on earth, you are blessed to be their parent. You have been given a most spectacular gift—a one of a kind, unique, extraordinary child to carry in your heart, thoughts, and soul for all eternity. And this is a reason to be forever thankful.

From my home and heart to yours may you have a blessed Thanksgiving and may it be filled with peace.

Bev Rosen Katowitz
TCF, Charlotte, NC

Christmas Past, Christmas Present

As the holidays approach, most bereaved parents feel anxiety, apprehension and some little bit of fear. The past is gone along with our beautiful children. We live in the now, the new reality, of holidays without our children.

This will be my fifth Christmas without my son, Todd. It will be my fourth Christmas without his children. And yet, I find that on some small level, I am looking forward to the holiday. I imagine the Christmases of the past when Todd was growing up and after he started his family. I also imagine Christmases of the future where Todd's children share in the traditions that their Dad so dearly loved. But that won't happen. I have come to accept that wives and children go on with their lives. I have come to accept that my son's children will not be a part of their father's family, his heritage or his legacy. That is the reality.

But I have also found that wonderful people can help make the holiday special. I do very little at Christmas. Some shopping...most of it on the Internet, a little in local stores. I send cash to my son's children. I don't know who or what they are these days, but cash is far better than something that has no significance to them. I do get pleasure in few things. I buy small toiletries for nursing home residents. I buy a gift for my dad's sister who is now 88. I buy for my mom's sister, my cousin, her husband and her daughter. I buy for my best friend. That's enough buying. My husband and I decide whether we want something special for the two of us and, if so, we buy it. Otherwise, we skip the gift giving. We won't be decorating this year, but we haven't decorated for five years.

We have changed our traditions...traditions that Todd loved so much. It is simply too painful to do this alone. We spend time with my family and a few friends. We marvel at the wonder that is Christmas for children. John and my aunt cook and my cousin, her daughter and I clean up in the big country kitchen of my cousin's home. Gifts are exchanged. There is no Christmas tree, but the three acres in front of the house are decorated with all kinds of lights and lighted figures. Santa and his reindeer are in the front garden, close to the road. Angels, reindeer and more gather in the west pasture and front yard. The house is framed in lights. It's quite lovely. For me that is enough.

Christmas will never be what it once was, but I no longer dread the holidays as I once did. Some of my Compassionate Friends have returned to old traditions with their surviving children and maybe even with grandchildren. Each of us learns to deal with Christmas in our own way. Each year I am a different person with a new perspective on the holidays. Next year I may decide to skip it all or immerse myself in the season. My truth is ever changing.

Find what is right for you. Pressures from others mean nothing. You choose whether a celebration is in order. You choose how to celebrate. You choose the old traditions or you choose some new ones...maybe you choose nothing and decide to go with the flow of the moment. As bereaved parents, you will always remember your child at Christmas, but as the years add up and grief starts to release its grip on your soul, you may find that you can keep your child in your heart and have room for the spirit of Christmas as well.

The holidays do get better. Life does get better. The days will gradually become softer and sweeter. The nights will ease into gentleness. Friendships will again have luster, and relationships will become deeper and more meaningful. That is the future for each of us. The present is driven by where we are in our grief. So for this and every Christmas Holiday season, be who you are and mark the day as you choose.

May we all have serenity throughout the Holiday season and in the years ahead.

Annette Mennen Baldwin
In memory of my son, Todd Mennen
TCF, Katy, TX

24 ways to survive Christmas when you're grieving

GRIEF

When you've lost someone you love, the Christmas holidays can seem far from the happiest time of the year. And grief at Christmas can feel particularly hard. From making new traditions to simply surviving in one piece, **here are our 24 tips for getting through the festive season after a bereavement:**

1. Talk about your grief at Christmas

If you've recently lost a close family member or friend, this Christmas will inevitably be different. Before you make plans, try talking about the fact that it might be really hard this year. That way others will feel that it's OK to be sad and there's no pressure to put on a brave face.

2. Keep things flexible

Family relationships often get strained around Christmas, and if you're coping with grief, you might feel extra anxious about getting together. Be open about your own needs and flexible around other people's. If you can't face organising a meal or visiting relatives, maybe a family walk or video call could work? Likewise, if someone really needs company, explore ways to help them feel supported.

3. Look after yourself

We all handle bereavement in [different ways](#), and the festive season can bring back memories that intensify your feelings. To lessen the physical effects of losing a loved one and look after your mental health, stick to a basic

everyday routine: Get up, eat regularly, get some daylight and exercise, and keep in touch with people around you.

4. Limit alcohol

T'is the season to be boozing – but overindulging to dull your feelings after a bereavement can make you feel a lot worse, and lead to arguments, depression, even addiction. If you're drinking too much, see point 3, and [ask for help](#).

5. Do it differently

Christmas traditions can seem meaningless when your loved one isn't there to share them. If something doesn't bring you joy, don't do it. It's OK to not write 37 Christmas cards or cover the house in multicoloured twinkling reindeer – motivation after losing a loved one to participate in festive activities can be hard to find. Go away somewhere new, curl up on the sofa, or skip the celebrations completely. The people who love you will understand.

6. Remember your loved one

There are many ways to [keep your loved one's memory alive](#) at Christmas. For example, light a candle by their photo or grave, decorate a bauble – or the whole house – in their honour, serve their favourite food, or buy something they would have loved and give it to someone who really needs it.

7. Make new traditions

If you're ready, try creating new traditions that suit your life now. If turkey was never really your thing, maybe now is the time for steak and chips, sushi or a slap-up veggie meal? Or donating to charity instead of buying presents and inviting the neighbours around for mince pies.

8. Talk about them

Mentioning people we've lost can feel comforting. Make a toast to them, or to 'absent friends', on Christmas Day. And if it feels right, watch old video clips or look through photos together.

9. Lend a hand

Sometimes focusing on other people's needs can give you a break from your own grief. If you're feeling up to it, [offer a helping hand](#) to someone else who is struggling – it is Christmas after all.

10. Express yourself

If you're missing them terribly, don't keep it all bottled up. Pour it into a letter or Christmas card, paint or draw a favourite memory, belt out a Christmas classic (with or without an audience), talk to someone or [join a grief support group](#). You'll feel better afterwards.

11. Reflect on your future

Try thinking about things you'd like to do in the coming year. From painting your bedroom or joining a choir to starting bereavement counselling or moving house: make a list of things that will make you feel better. You might change your mind, but at least you'll emerge from Christmas with some ideas for what your future could look like now.

12. It's ok to be ok

Grief can suddenly lift like fog when you forget for a moment that they're gone. If it happens, don't feel guilty – allow yourself some happiness in the middle of it all.

13. Feel free to decline

At Christmas, we can all feel the pressure to show up, whether that's physically at parties or emotionally, through acts of giving. If that all sounds too draining, feel free to decline. Your friends and family will understand.

14. Keep it low-key and stress-free

Paring back Christmas can feel right for some people, especially in those first few Christmases after losing someone. Opt for Secret Santa instead of [buying presents](#) for everyone, and make a donation to your loved one's favourite charity instead of buying and sending Christmas cards.

15. Attend a local memorial service

Many faiths hold memorial services at Christmas for those we have lost in the years past. Being with others who are grieving at this time of year, and [sharing that loss in a faith setting](#), can prove very healing.

16. Find new ways to keep busy

Some people find throwing themselves into Christmas is a nice way to keep themselves busy and their mind off their grief. Try making from scratch what you would have made yourself: mince pies, cards, presents, gravy... The festive season offers plenty of extra work if that's what you need.

17. Indulge in a little self care

When you lose a loved one, it can be easy to adopt a care taking role - looking after everyone around you without taking care of yourself. Set aside an evening or a day in your calendar to do just that. There are lots of self care ideas online from [spending an afternoon reading](#) to batch cooking some of your favourite healthy meals to freeze for those nights when you can't be bothered to cook.

18.. Dabble in some mindful activities

Anxiety is a very common symptom of grief and feeling alone. Slow down racing minds by doing something mindful with your hands instead. From colouring Christmas cards to sewing your own stockings, there's a wealth of calming crafts to discover.

19. Get something for yourself

There's no harm in treating yourself to something this Christmas too that you feel might help you with your grief. From a cookery class to keep busy to **therapy or counselling** to air your feelings, buying yourself something says yourself that you matter this Christmas too.

20. Connect with nature

Getting amongst nature improves our overall wellbeing by reducing feelings of stress and sadness, and Christmas offers us lots of opportunities to connect with the season of winter. Woodland walks collecting foliage to bring indoors and dress the house with is a longstanding tradition and, if you're grieving, this can prove impactful.

21. Give journaling a go

You needn't treat yourself to a fancy new notebook to give this powerful grief tool a go. Document how you're feeling, write down the things you wish you'd said to your loved one and jot down all those memories you have of them as they pop up. It's a great way to watch the shape of your grief change over time and Christmas is a great time to start.

22. Know that grief brain fog is real

If you've found yourself forgetting why you walked into a room or have found your car keys in the fridge, do not worry. Grief has a way of fogging up the brain and affecting the short term memory. It disappears in time, but be mindful of the fact that this can cause more problems than usual at Christmas. Don't be afraid to keep little lists on your phone of presents you need to buy, things you need to do and even of who got you which present so you can thank people properly.

23. Give a meaningful gift

If you're sharing Christmastime with people also grieving your loved one, a gift [that reminds them of that person](#) can be well received. Some sewists will turn your loved one's clothes into memorial blankets, quilts or even tree decorations. Or you could simply purchase their favourite books and records and give them out, explaining to each of them why the person you lost loved that item so much.

24. Ignore Christmas altogether

If it all seems too much, you don't have to embark on festivities at all. Christmas is, after all, just another day. Shut the curtains, order in food and find a new television series to get your teeth stuck into.

From: Untangle Grief (untanglegrief.com)

T'was The Night Before Christmas for Bereaved Parents

T'was the month before Christmas and I dreaded the days, That I knew I was facing - the holiday craze. The stores were all filled with holiday lights, In hopes of drawing customers by day and by night. As others were making the holiday plans, My heart was breaking - I couldn't understand. I had lost my dear child a few years before, And I knew what my holidays had in store. When out of nowhere, there arose such a sound, I sprang to my feet and was looking around. Away to the window I flew like a flash, Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash. The Twelve Days of Christmas Day
Eleven - December 24
Twas the Night Before Christmas for Bereaved Parents
The sight that I saw took my breath away, And my tears turned to smiles in the light of the day. When what to my wondering eyes should appear, But a cluster of butterflies fluttering near. With beauty and grace they performed a dance, I knew in a moment, this wasn't by chance. The hope that they gave me was a sign from above. That my child was still near me and that I was loved. The message they brought was my holiday gift. And I cried when I saw them in spite of myself. As I knelt closer to get a better view, One allowed me to pet it - as if it knew - That I needed the touch of its fragile wing To help me get through the holiday scene. In the days that followed, I carried the thought, Of the message the butterflies left in my heart. No matter what happens or what days lie ahead, Our children are with us - they're not really dead. Yes, the message of the butterflies still rings in my ears. A message of HOPE - a message so dear. And I imagined they sang as they flew out of sight: "To all bereaved parents ~ We love you tonight."

(Found on www.sugardoodle.net)

7 Ways to Help Grieving Children During the Holidays

- 1. Allow this year to be different.** Trying to pull off the perfect holiday celebration will likely only cause you and the child more stress. In addition to the grief a major loss brings, there are secondary losses as well. If you are facing financial hardships, allow there to be fewer gifts this year. If you don't have the energy to cook a meal for the whole family, order out, go to someone else's home, or make reservations. Children are sensitive to your stress, so don't take on more than you can. There are many tips below that will help you include the child in the conversation and planning. **Understand the developmental perspectives of death for children.** Research performed by Maria Nagy segments children's perspectives of death into three categories, though the age ranges are a guideline and will vary from child to child. Use this information in tandem with what your child tells you about how they view the loss to find age and worldview-appropriate ways for your child to express what they feel.
 - Ages 3 to 5: Death is a physical relocation, and the deceased exists somewhere else.
 - Ages 5 to 9: Death is often personified, and can be avoided.
 - Ages 9 to 10: Death is universal, inevitable, and irreversible.
- 2. Balance new and old traditions.** If a child's mother died and is the person that would usually read *The Night Before Christmas* to the family on Christmas Eve, what do you do? Skip it? Have someone else read it? Instead of trying to figure it out on your own, ask the child what they want to do. There isn't a right or wrong answer, and this way you empower the child to share their feelings with you as well as tap into their own ability to do grief-work. This allows you to keep traditions that work, let go of those that don't, and create new ones because you want to, not because you have to.

3. **Don't pretend the death didn't occur.** No one forgets that someone they love is missing. Pretending that everything is fine will not temper the pain. Instead, it will add confusion to what is already a disorienting situation. Instead, talk openly with the child about how you both feel, and how you miss them this year. This sends a clear signal to the child that talking about their feelings is encouraged, and that you are a safe person they can lean on.
4. **Don't pretend the death didn't occur.** No one forgets that someone they love is missing. Pretending that everything is fine will not temper the pain. Instead, it will add confusion to what is already a disorienting situation. Instead, talk openly with the child about how you both feel, and how you miss them this year. This sends a clear signal to the child that talking about their feelings is encouraged, and that you are a safe person they can lean on.
5. **Ask them how they would like to remember their special person during the holidays.** Whether creating a holiday decoration using photos of their special person, writing a letter to put in the deceased person's stocking, letting the child set a place at the dinner table where the empty chair will be, or baking their favorite cookie recipe, there are countless ways to weave memories into family gatherings. Let the child weigh in on what they would like to do, and you will have a great opportunity to teach them the power of remembering.
6. **Consider age-appropriate volunteer opportunities in honor of the special person.** If the person who died supported a cause, see if you can make that part of the holiday season. Donate money or goods to their favorite charity, volunteer at your local soup kitchen, hand out water during a 5k or find some other event where you and the child can learn more about the deceased person's passions while continuing their legacy. This will benefit you, the child, and the people the organization serves. After all, this is the season for compassion!

7. **Stick to routines while allowing for some flexibility.** Grieving children benefit from a normal routine, but the holidays alone can disrupt schedules, especially with school breaks, travel, and holiday events. To whatever extent is possible, try to keep a steady routine, especially with meals and bedtime. But don't be overly rigid. If the child starts talking about why they miss their person at 8:55, and bedtime is at 9:00, no need to cut them off. Balance their regular schedule with an awareness of what they need in the moment.

By Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT
Dec. 20, 2022

Chili Festival

Frank's Chili Fest is an annual event in the Plaza-Midwood neighborhood. It is held in honor and memory of Frank McLean, a young child who died due to Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC). Last year Frank McLean Forever funded \$35,000 to support bereaved families and fund research to combat SUDC. The Charlotte chapter of TCF participated in the chili fest this year. Well, we didn't cook any prize winning chili but we did have a table at the festival. Donna and Ralph Goodrich and Julie Mariano manned the table and were able to distribute information, answer questions, enjoy beautiful weather and hopefully sample some good chili. This kind of out-reach is one way to let the community know that TCF is here to support them.

A Letter From the Editor

Hello Friends,

I hope you have had the opportunity to get outside and enjoy the natural wonders of the fall season in North Carolina. The Highlands and the Blue Ridge Parkway are a blaze of color! The views are breathtaking! If you haven't done so, go outside and take a walk in the woods. There is something very healing and calming about a fall walk in the woods; the glorious colors and the crunch of dry leaves under your feet. It's also very good exercise for all ages. So, go out for a fall walk and enjoy.

The oncoming holiday season is upon us. The holidays are particularly hard for bereaved families. It's a time of year that is steeped in traditions, family gatherings, church services and perhaps travel. Family and friends have expectations for you to participate and you just don't know how you are going to it. I remember the first holiday season after Michael's death thinking to myself, "I can't do this". How can I hang his stocking? Michael's not here! How can we decorate the Christmas tree? Michael's not here It's OK for you not to continue those traditions. Spend the holidays doing what feels right for you. You can change traditions, drop old traditions or create new traditions.

Newly bereaved families are dreading the days leading up to a holiday. As each day gets closer to the big event, you don't know how you will make through the day! You will! The day will come and go and you will think to yourself, "I made it through the day".

I wish you all a very blessed holiday season no matter what faith you follow. Find some creative ways to honor and memorialize your child/grandchild/sibling.

Love and Peace

Susan (Michael's mom)