



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest

NEWSLETTER

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

Special Edition

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YOU ARE INVITED

The Compassionate Friends - Metrowest Chapter meets twice a month. Evenings on the third Tuesday from 7:30 to 9:30 P.M. in the library of St. Mary's Parish Center, Route 16, Washington St., Holliston. The parish center is located between the church and the rectory

The afternoon sharing meetings will be held on the last Tuesday of the month. We will meet in the parish center of St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Milford. **Please call Ed or Joan Motuzas at (508) 473-4239 by the last Monday or earlier if you plan to attend.**

Directions....On Route 16 (East Main St.) going north through downtown Milford (Main St.) at Store 24 on the left, take a left at the lights onto Winter St. The parish center is the last building before the church.

Going south on Route 16 (East Main St.) after Sacred Heart Church on the left. Bear right on Main St., continue past Dunkin' Donuts on the right, proceed to the next set of lights and take a right onto Winter St. There is parking on both sides of the street. Look for Compassionate Friends signs to meeting room.

WHO ARE WE?

The Compassionate Friends is a nonprofit, nonsectarian, mutual assistance, self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings and grandparents.

Our primary purpose is to assist the bereaved in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of a child and to support their efforts to achieve physical and emotional health.

The secondary purpose is to provide information and education about bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents for those who wish to understand. Our objective is to help members of the community, including family, friends, employers, co-workers, and professionals to be supportive.

Meetings are open to all bereaved parents and siblings and grandparents. No dues or fees are required to belong to the Metrowest Chapter of The Compassionate Friends.

A Very Special Newsletter

This newsletter is special in that it is only for **Bereaved Parents That Have Lost A Child From Drug Addiction.**

The intent of this newsletter is to provide help and compassion and most of all, an understanding for parents who have had a child die as a result of substance abuse or addiction. You may want to attend a meeting when you feel ready.

The Compassionate Friends are here for you.

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS

Our 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 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.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Chapter Information

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The Compassionate Friends has a national office that supports and coordinates chapter activities. The national office can be reached as follows:

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Grieving the Death of Addiction

by Lindsay Kramer on November 20, 2014 in *Living in Recovery, Living with Addiction, Love and Relationships*

As a systemic therapist, I look at most everything through the lens of relationships. In working with my substance-dependent patients, the analogy of addiction to a drug is no different.

Like a new relationship, at first, the use is thrilling. There's the high, the intimacy, the butterflies that come from anticipation of time spent together. When that time becomes more frequent, the attachment becomes stronger. Then comes the increased time spent getting high, followed by the isolation, the cravings for the drug, and placing the addiction as the only priority in one's life. The feeling of love may even be developed.



The dependence continually intensifies, money is spent to excess, and the "relationship" can become a full-time job to maintain. The drug becomes a permanent fixture that will never leave the now-addict. What once was exploratory and fun becomes dependent, shameful, and confining, further polarizing the relationship with addiction from the real relationships with everyone else. "My husband actually thought I was having an affair because of the time spent away from the family. He knew I was lying about something, but he couldn't figure out what was happening," a patient once reported to me in explaining her relationship with prescription opiates. "I wasn't having an affair with any other person, but Oxy became my best friend. I was in love with it and never wanted to be separated from it."

In my recovery-based work, I personify addiction as means to help my patients understand the severity of their addiction and their need to separate themselves from it in order to progress within their recoveries. In working with these patients in treatment, there is a significant emotional response when they come to understand that in order to move forward in their recovery, they must first say goodbye to the notion of ever being able to have a healthy relationship with their addiction.

This is where the analogy of the death comes into fruition.

Why does the relationship with addiction have to be explained as grieving a death?

Thankfully, relationships with people can be impaired or improved. People can grow and work to resolve problems.

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Conversely, one may try and get back together with their toxic “ex,” and they may find that the honeymoon stage is transitory and the same underlying problems continue to surface. I equivocate the latter process to a relapse; in order for us to be healthy, we must separate ourselves from the unhealthy. And as morbid as it may seem, comparing the relationship with addiction to a death provides a concrete finality that addicts need in order to reach the stage of acceptance. They must understand that despite how much a part of them loves their addiction and wants a relationship with it forever, their addiction will never be able to reciprocate healthy love in return.

Death in this regard is the symbolization of the ending of a very deep relationship. It’s important to endure the grief process in order to understand the depth of the addiction itself, but to surrender also means to accept the death and move on from it.

How does one go about applying the analogy of grief into addiction treatment?

In working with grief itself, I’ve come to understand that 1.) it [unfortunately] is a lifelong process, and 2.) it endures many stages, several times over. That’s when the Kübler-Ross model (1969) of the five stages of grief comes into the limelight. For those needing a refresher, the stages are Denial, Bargaining, Anger, Depression and Acceptance. When applying this analogy of grieving the death of addiction, I explain and process each stage with my patients in order for us to understand where they are in their overall recovery.



Denial: This is addiction in its active stage, and there is difficulty in acknowledging that the consequences of maintaining this relationship outweigh the benefits of the relationship itself. Denial may present as the addict not wanting to surrender the relationship due to fear of change, fear of suffering, and/or fear of “doing the work” involved in the grieving (i.e. recovery) process. Denial in this stage appears as taking the stance of the problem being everyone else’s and not of their own. “I’ve got this handled; I can manage it on my own.” The addict is not yet connected to the toxicity of this relationship and will defend it to others. A common stance in this stage may be, “why would it hurt me?” Perhaps, the addict is aware of the pain that the relationship has caused to others, but they are still in disbelief that it would ever cause pain

In this stage, the addict is desperate to demonstrate to everyone else that the relationship is not toxic by attempts to prove that “things will be different this time”.

Bargaining: This is an area in which relapses can occur, if any sobriety has been achieved. The addict attempts to bargain with recovery by means of “only just having a few drinks,” trying to maintain friendships with using friends, or by not declaring one’s sobriety to others in attempt to minimize the severity of their addiction.

“I didn’t tell anyone I was sober outside of the people in my meetings, and I ended up relapsing several weeks after I got out of treatment,” is a common declaration from patients in this stage after they return to treatment.

In this stage, the addict is desperate to demonstrate to everyone else that the relationship is not toxic by attempts to prove that “things will be different this time,” or that they “can control it this time.” The addict may even blame others for why the relationship isn’t working, and may displace emotional reactivity onto those that attempt to separate him from his use. This is the stage where the addict realizes that the addiction is not within their control, however they are persistent in their attempts to demonstrate any shred of control that they have over this relationship.

Anger: This is the stage in which the addict becomes angry at the clarity that this relationship is toxic, has caused them pain, and cannot be controlled. The anger is experienced at the awareness that the addiction has lost them jobs, cost exorbitant amounts of money, ended healthy relationships, and has ultimately caused them much pain. The addict may be angry at feeling abandoned and betrayed by the addiction, despite how they had tried to defend it early on in the relationship.

As I strongly believe that anger is a secondary emotion which blankets our deeper pain and motivates us to take action, anger can be projected onto the relationship itself, or onto oneself for allowing the addiction to cause such immense damage. In this case, the addict experiences being angry toward the addiction and much more toward themselves, causing a frenetic urge to take responsibility and action away from the relationship.

Depression: Aside from the chemical depression resulting from the recalibration of the Hedonic Set Point (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), depression is likely the primary emotion covered by anger, and takes many forms in this stage. This is where the addict may experience sadness over the awareness of the wreckage that was caused by the addiction. “I became very sad once I realized how I let the addiction treat me and how it abandoned me,” one patient expressed.

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There may also be depression at the realization of how the addict has treated themselves in the course of their addiction.

In this stage, the addict may become depressed due to the realization that they aren't ever going to be able to drink/use again and that they do have to say goodbye to their relationship once and for all. Depression sets in about the idyllic thought of not being able to enjoy a glass of champagne at a wedding, use more responsibly like they did in the earlier stages of the relationship, and/or over the fact that their recovery is one they will have to manage every day for the rest of their lives. Depression may also be felt over the realization that this traumatic relationship is one that may have to be re-experienced daily in order to prevent the addict from returning to the relationship.

Depression is akin to acceptance, but differs by deeper emotional responsiveness when the addict in recovery finally begins to grieve the loss of this relationship.

Acceptance is vocalizing the understanding that this relationship is a disease that will only continue to kill them if they continue to keep it alive.

Acceptance: This is the triumphant stage in which the addict in recovery accepts the loss of their relationship and begins to apply the conceptualization of living life free from addiction. This is the stage in which the recovered readily acknowledge that the fantasized wedding champagne toast could lead to a DUI following the reception, that the hangovers were exponentially worse than the highs, and that they want to experience lasting, healthy relationships in the future. Acceptance is vocalizing the understanding that this relationship is a disease that will only continue to kill them if they continue to keep it alive.

Acceptance takes form as surrender, as freedom, and as the choice that the recovered make in order to say goodbye to this relationship forever. In my experience, those that reach this stage are active in their recoveries and go on to assist others in earlier stages of this grieving process. The recovered that have accepted the death of their addiction go on to lead lives that are not without struggle, but the most important change is that they are now able to lead their own lives again.

Grief Recovery after a Substance Passing

While most major causes of preventable death are declining, drugs are an exception. The death toll has doubled in the last decade, now claiming a life every 14 minutes. Among the most commonly abused are OxyContin, Vicodin, Xanax and Soma now causing more deaths than heroin and cocaine combined.

In some ways, prescription drugs are more dangerous than illicit ones because users don't have their guard up, "people feel they are safer with prescription drugs because you get them from a pharmacy and they are prescribed by a doctor." "Younger people believe they are safer because they see their parents taking them. It doesn't have the same stigma as taking street drugs".

Anyone who has lost a loved one through addiction knows that society treats that death in a much different manner than a death from any other cause and it creates unique bereavement needs. Many drug-overdose death bereaved parents routinely misrepresent the cause of a family member's death fearing that the person's reputation will be greatly diminished or feel ashamed for the true cause of the death.

In a recent study conducted by Dr. William Feigelman, Phd, Dr. John Jordan, Phd and Bernard Gorman, Phd on Parental Grief after a Childs Drug Death found some interesting conclusions:



Higher problems were reported for a drug and suicide bereaved death in comparison to an accidental or natural death.

Evidence suggests that parents who lose a child to a drug-related or overdose death encountered much the same stigmatization and exclusionary treatment that suicide survivors confront.

Greater grief and mental health difficulties comparatively to accidental and natural cause deaths.

Close to half of the drug and suicide bereaved parents encountered blaming responses from their significant other.

Although many parents struggle with the challenges of losing a child to a drug overdose, it is surprising and troubling that so little research has been devoted to identifying the unique bereavement needs of this large under-served population. In this same research study, they suggested clinicians need to pay particular attention to the social condemnation overdose drug death survivor parents confront. Advising some to avoid "toxic" relatives and/or encouraging others to openly challenge unhelpful but well-intentioned efforts among associates may help these parents to establish more supportive environments for their healing.

Within the last couple of years, deaths of Heath Ledger, Anna Nicole Smith, and Michael Jackson, an outpouring of media attention has appeared, attesting to widespread societal interest, if not fascination, with this topic. Yet, it is a remarkable disconnect that so many give such great thought and discussion to the subject of overdose death generally, with little more than a perfunctory glance at the impact these deaths have on surviving family members.



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Following are some informative websites where additional information and support may be found:

GRASP - Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing Grasp was created to help provide sources of help, compassion and most of all, understanding, for families or individuals who have had a loved one die as a result of substance abuse or addiction. Grasp is part of the website, <http://broken-no-more.org/> <http://www.couragetospeak.org/> Saving lives by empowering youth to be drug free and encouraging parents to communicate effectively with their children about drugs. <http://momstell.org/> Momstell's mission is to promote awareness and eliminate the stigma of substance abuse through improving treatment, education, legislation, policy and prevention. <http://dadonfire.net/> On fire about the impact of addiction and need for solutions.

Information mostly gathered from Los Angeles Times Article Drug Deaths now outnumber traffic fatalities and Clinical Study done on Parental Grief After a Child's Drug Death



Ann Marie's son, Christopher, was a great student and a gifted baseball player, and he was very close to his mother and sister. When he was 20 years old, Christopher was in a minor car crash and was

prescribed opioids for back pain following the crash. Christopher's tolerance grew quickly, and he sought out doctors who would prescribe him more opioids. He increased his intake from one pill a day to 25 pills a day.

Ann Marie described how these pills and his addiction completely changed her son: everything he had worked for no longer mattered to him, he had trouble sleeping, often did not come home at night, and became defensive and combative toward the people he loved. Ann Marie tried admitting him to various treatment facilities, but he was either rejected or kicked out for poor behavior. Without help, his addiction persisted and intensified. Within roughly two years of beginning to use prescription opioids, Christopher overdosed and died at just 22 years old.

Stepping Out of the Cycle of Chaos.

For the first few years of our son's active use, we were bound and determined that we were going to control it and stop it. He was very young and both my husband and I believed that we still could parent our way out of this mess.

So we yelled, we screamed, we got angry. At times we even physically restrained our son (thankfully he only weight about 110 pounds at the time).

Eventually we figured out that none of that was working. The more we tried to control the mess, the bigger the mess got.

Our home had become a war zone.

And the more we battled, the more the members of the family became objects, pawns in the chess game.

Our son had become the enemy to conquer rather than the valued child of God that he was. There were times when I could not find one thing to love about him in the middle of this ugliness.

And someone said to me, "do you want to be right for the sake of justice or do you want to love for the sake of relationship."

At that moment I determined that I was going to step out of the cycle of chaos and simply, radically love my son, not for what he did or didn't do, but because of WHOSE he was.

My responses changed. My way of being around my son was different.

I recognized that my son was not the enemy, addiction was.

I stopped worrying about what other people thought.

I began to affirm him in the occasional things that he did right.

I practiced the pause, understanding that I don't have to say everything that is on my mind.

I went to my spouse and processed what to do and even practiced my responses

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And I waited until the next day to react. Almost everything looks different after a night of sleep.

I can't say that I've been perfect in this and that I don't sometimes relapse into my old ways of control and manipulation. I do that less and less these days.

And the relationship I have with my son had changed. Whether he uses or not, I will purpose to love him right where he is at.

I can only change myself.

Pam Lanhart
Director Thrive! Family Support
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THE SWITCH STAYS ON: ATTACHMENT AFTER A LOSS

How we start out in life has consequences for the rest of our lives. The connections we make, or don't make, to whoever parents us, sets the stage for all our future relationships. The more our parents are dependable, nurturing and sensitive to our needs, the more we are set up to be part of dependable, nurturing and sensitive relationships throughout life. If our parenting is erratic, lacking in nurture, or insensitive to our needs, our future relationships can be filled with anxiety, expecting or fearing to be let down again, or we may avoid closeness in relationships as we mistrust the dependability of others. While no one way of looking at people can explain everything about us, as each of us is complicated with a great variety of influences, it seems fair to say that how we attach, or don't attach, in our early relationships can have ripple effects throughout our lives.



I recently heard a speaker, Dr. Guy Diamond, talk about this attachment way of looking at ourselves and our relationships. He talked about how we can be so attached, so wired, to our parents that even when we are living independently, grown and out of the home, we can feel a deep need to connect to them, especially in times of change or when we feel vulnerable. When we are sick, we want the tender care a sick child receives (or should receive). When we have important things happen, good or bad, we want to call and tell our parents. When we have big decisions to make, we feel the need to talk it over with mom or dad or both. The speaker said that "the switch stays on" and we feel the pull of attachment to our parents even if they have died and are no longer physically here with us. Even after death, the switch stays on.

How true this is and not just for children toward their parents. For parents whose children have died, the switch stays on. For lovers, spouses and partners who are now alone. For bereaved brothers, sisters, and best of friends. We get connected and make deep attachments. Our lives are wired together in ways that cannot be severed. Even when a part of us has been cut off, or amputated, it still feels like it's there, and we yearn for it.

Because the switch never turns off, longing has been found to be one of the most common feelings experienced by grieving people. We long for many things—the sound of a voice, the sight of a smile, the feel of a hand in ours or a body next to us. In the absence of these things and persons, we seek out substitutes in relationships to other people and things, yet the longing doesn't ever completely go away, because...you know...the switch stays on.

There are some things in life that we don't have to live with and accept because we can change them. It is in our nature to resist things which cause us pain and to fight to eliminate the source of the pain, and that's generally a good thing. We make human errors when we give up too soon, give in to fatalism and say, "well, what can you do" when there are things we can do. We sometimes settle for too little in life when it could be better. This switch stuck in the "on" position, however, is not one of those things which we can change by will or strength of effort.

Because we are wired this way, our challenge is to learn to live with it instead of trying over and over to turn it off. Not going to happen, can't be done. We are connected, and what a terrible loss it would be if the switch were actually turned off, if the feelings of connection and presence left behind were lost, too. It would be too much darkness. Unnecessary darkness as our grief is dark enough already, and we need the light provided by those stubborn "on" switches, small but important comfort like night-lights for a small child when all the other light has gone away.



Thank goodness the switch is always on to remind us that what we had and feels totally lost still exists in our memories and hearts. It assures us that we will always be connected by an attachment which is strong enough to survive even when it feels like all the power has gone out. Even then, the switch stays on.

Greg Adams
Program Coordinator
Center for Good Mourning
Arkansas Children's Hospital



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



The Addict's Mom (TAM) Mothers Connected for Life

The Mission of the Addict's Mom: To "Share Without Shame"

*Written by Sherry Schlenke, the mother of a
child with the disease of addiction.*

The Addict's Mom provides a forum to "Share Without Shame" for the mothers of children suffering from the deadly disease of addiction. The importance of this mission cannot be over-stated. A loving mother will pass through several stages upon learning of her, child's addiction. First, she experiences shock and denial, then she experiences feelings of guilt and self-recrimination. As she begins to explore ways to help her child heal, she will be surprised to learn that relatives, friends, co-workers, and even experts in the field of substance abuse will contribute to her feelings of self-blame and shame.

She will be questioned about her child's medical, social, and academic history. She will be asked to recall developmental milestones, toilet training, thumb-sucking, whether she fed her baby breast milk or bottled formula, diet, allergies, surgeries, illnesses, broken limbs, and vaccinations. She will be asked how much time she spent away from her home, how diligent she was in setting rules, boundaries, and expectations.

She will be asked about her child's emotional well-being, moods, sleep patterns, and peer inter-actions. Then she will be asked the really difficult questions: why did you not notice that he..., how did it not occur to you that she...why did you not seek professional help for this child before we reached a crisis point? This mother will be overwhelmed by both the questions and the answers. Her child is an addict!!! He/she goes to dangerous neighborhoods, buys illegal drugs, commits crimes to finance the habit, and steals from friends and family. He is homeless, a bum in the gutter,

Immoral, and a common criminal. In her mind, she will replay over and over her new mantra: I failed as a mother. My actions or inactions are the reason that my child is slowly dying. I am being punished, as is my child for my failures as a mother. The shame becomes part of her very being; the shame intrudes in her thoughts day and night.

She has night terrors, and she wakes up screaming, dripping in sweat. She compartmentalizes her life so as to hide the truth from others. Friends do not call, drop by, or socialize with her. She becomes lonely, depressed, ill, insecure, secretive, guarded, anxious, fearful, pessimistic, suspicious; she isolates herself. She loses her close and open relationships with her family, perhaps even with her spouse. Most devastatingly, she begins to lose her very self.

His Mother's Heart is broken and crushed; she cannot find a way to help her beloved child or to cope with the loss of the child she once knew as only a mother can. He may be breathing, but he is not the child that she rocked, hugged, loved, nurtured, and worshipped. He is but a pitiful shadow of the child that she knew. She observes other families celebrating life's milestones: a graduation, a wedding, a birth, an award, a new career. She commits her life to "saving" her child.

She visits her child in dreadful, frightful, places: the prison, the rehab center, the homeless shelter, the hospital emergency room, the Psychiatric Unit, or inescapably, the morgue. She wants to go to the beach, to the mountains, on a picnic, to a concert, to a ballgame, or on a family vacation with her child! She talks tirelessly and endlessly to experts in the field; she learns the dreadful statistics for a positive outcome. She feels hopeless when she realizes that the odds for recovery are not in her child's favor. She learns about topics and details that are taboo, shunned, horrifying. Now she grows angry, bitter, and envious. She removes her rose-colored glasses, for she is desperate in body and soul. She struggles to climb out of her bed in the morning, and to perform the rituals of daily life. Perhaps she has other children, whose physical, emotional, and social needs must be met. How can she turn away from those children? She tries to smile, but she wears a mask, a disguise. She attempts to be cheerful for others; the strain on her is enormous.

Often, the troubled child dies. The mother must meet with the coroner, the police, the funeral home director, the pastor, priest, or the rabbi. She signs official papers, visits his bedroom, looks upon his books and clothing; these are the reminders that he once existed. She must make decisions as to the disposal of these material goods, not only the goods from his adult life, but what shall she do with his baby album where she painstakingly recorded his early years? She holds the clay plate with his little hand imprint, the finger-painted Mother's Day card, and most heart-wrenching, she looks upon the family photo albums. Difficult decisions must be made. Why does she have to make them? A mother should not bury her child!

These mothers of children suffering from addiction, whether in active struggle, in recovery, or dead, are shell-shocked, even battle-scarred. TAM is the only forum where these world-weary mothers, both those who are engaged in an active struggle for the very life of her child, and those for whom the struggle is over, can share their experiences. The stories are tragically the same, for only the names are different.

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The mothers of TAM are connected by a shared, but horrible bond. We remind each other that addiction does not discriminate; addiction destroys people of all social, cultural, age, gender, economic, educational, religious and racial groups. Addiction can and does devastate families.

TAM moms understand, they feel compassion, they listen, and they do not judge as others do. TAM allows mothers to be frank, honest, and forthcoming. We can open our Pandora's box and reveal the most intimate details about our lives, our children, our friends, our families and our struggles.

Who are we to judge, to scold, to blame? We each live in our personal glass house. We shall not throw a stone upon a grieving mother, for each and every one of us is a grieving mother. We will complain, whine, and rant. We will offer comfort, support, suggestions, and advice. We will learn from each other. We will call, post a message online, send an email, send a text message, or even visit our new "TAM mom friends". TAM will and does save our very souls. The Addict's Mom allows us to truly "Share Without Shame".

We moms of TAM are connected for life.



www.addictsmom.com

*Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for
itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you*
-Kahlil Gibran

I get up five times a night to make sure her shoes are still here. I watch her sleep like I did when she was a baby, with her fist curled under her cheek and her lips pursed as if she's making tough decisions. Her few belongings are nearby in boxes and baskets in this makeshift bedroom. It isn't the most comfortable place but it's better than where she's been and safety lies over her on top of the blankets, keeping her warm.

This face and body houses the soul of my oldest child. The baby I grew up alongside, as a young mother making a million mistakes at the expense of both of us. She's two years older than I was when I brought her into this world on the floor of a birth center down the street from our tiny house.

She was the strongest thing I've ever done. This child is made of the bones of my ancestors, covered in grace and wrapped in faith, carrying a stubborn streak with the size and fury of a wide, holy river.



My baby's been living in dark places. Somewhere along the way, a bad turn was made and she lost her way. When I attempted to go after her, the forest was too dark and full of monsters for me to follow without losing the hands of my other children. The answer to my million prayers was always the same, it wasn't my time to even try and save her. Be still. Wait. It is not time. Her journey is her own... Left to sit on the sidelines, all I could do was pray and keep one ear to the ground as I listened for her heartbeat, making sure it stayed steady and strong.

There are always so many people giving opinions when skies turn gray. "You MUST follow her!" they said. "You must save her!" Everyone always thinks they know what is best for other people's lives. But I'm the bear that is her mama, and I knew with my whole being that the only person who could save my child is herself. She must find that thin silver line inside and use it to climb out of the hell she fell into. I could hold the rope but mustn't try and climb it for her. I never *ever* left her but instead carried an immense amount of sureness that she had everything she needed to come home to herself and to us. My girl is little but she is fierce. There's no demon that is a match for her sheer force of will. She is, like her mother and grandmothers, made of fire.

A few Sundays ago, my ear that always listened for my girl, still pressed to the ground, heard her small voice. "I'm ready, mom. I want to come home". Finally, after five billion years, it's time to bring my sweet girl home again. I rounded up my tribe, shamans and lovers and healers and warriors of God, and with everything in us we bombarded my girl with oceans of clarity and focus and redemption. Bit by bit, the lights inside her glowed more and more brightly. I accepted the kindness of strangers who held us up and fed our spirits, making all things possible. She wasn't just coming home to me, she was coming home to herself.

And then, I bought my daughter's freedom and made plans for recovery. While we wait for those careful plans to unfold, she sleeps deeply and I wake often. I go to her room on soft feet with a prayer on my lips. My heart falls from my throat a little each time I see her breathing softly, still under my roof in this home where Bad Things are banished and angels stand guard. What I want to say to her but still haven't found the voice is this:

(continued on next page)



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



(continued from last page)

Sweet girl, when you thought your mama left you, I never did. I let go and trusted you to walk your path, no matter how dark it was. I could taste my fear for you on so many heavy days, but I'm your mama. I know your soul and it's promise. That life you lived is not who you are. You carry the light in you and you are a precious child of God and he has plans to give you a hope and a future. Always, always I believe in the gift that is you. I am proud of you, you are strong. I will help you pick up the pieces and glue them back in place. You will forever be my precious one, no matter what. I see your heart and all the possibilities it holds. I see you, I see you, I see you.

We can never know all of our future, but if we listen the Holy Spirit whispers in a million different ways. I believe now that our job as mothers and fathers is to listen to the individual drumbeat of each child's heart. In that rhythm, you will find the cadence of your son's and daughter's journeys, and you will learn to dance alongside them. Each of our children is not just a blessing, they are also their own prayer. They are butterflies and sometimes coming out of a chrysalis is a violent, yet still stunningly beautiful, process. We are all being born into ourselves, in every glorious moment.

I don't expect my girl to choose her path the way I would choose it. I don't assume all days will stream sunshine into the windows of our lives from now on. She will stumble and fall, as we all do. As Anne Lamott says, life can get terribly lifelike sometimes. What I do know is my child is home in her bed, and her shoes are staying where she put them, and soon I will be able to rest deeply all night, safe in the knowledge that this part of our journey is complete. For right now, this is enough.

Amen.

**By *Tumbleweields*
@tumblewiedsblog**

Glow in the Dark

Upon arriving for my haircut appointment, I went to the restroom. A flower pot sat on a table with a philodendron spilling over the edges. There was no light source other than the overhead fixture that remained off except when someone came into the room. For a few seconds I focused my attention on the plant wondring, "How does it grow in the dark?"



As I eyed the container of verdant leaves and tossed the question around in my head, my thoughts turned to families of addicts. How can we continue to grow, and even thrive when we're stuck into the malnourished soil of addiction?

A plant has no choice where it's planted or potted. It has no control on when, or if, it will be watered and fed plant food. Lack of water and food could result in the plant's death. Similarly, as a family member of an addict, I had no choice of where my loved one's decisions would place me. I didn't die because of my son's choices; in fact, I continued to grow as a wife, mother and friend in spite of the bleakness of the situation.

Initially, though, I withered on the vine when his addiction became obvious. I felt alone, hopeless, helpless and useless. My idyllic upbringing had not prepared me for what lay ahead. But I didn't shrivel up and turn brown. Shoots of hope sprouted in my darkness, and I carried on, trying to make sense out of the chaos of our family.

Through many years of my addict's entry into treatment centers, broken promises and relapses, my growth continued. I blossomed when I exposed the darkness to the light of truth. I began to share our family's story and how we discovered hope in the wasteland of addiction. Listed below are a few ways I established roots:

I admitted there was a problem in my family. I confided in some friends who I knew would love and support me regardless of what was happening at home.

I sought counseling. Drugs and alcohol were not in my past experiences, and I was ill-equipped to handle the stresses of a young adult addict.

I deepened my faith in God, my Higher Power. I read the Bible and clung to the promises of restoration and redemption I found in scriptures. My prayer life became honest and intentional.

I attended support groups for family members coping with an addict (NarAnon). Other parents struggling to understand their loved ones met together, and we shared our experience, strength and hope.

I realized I could not fix my addict which lifted a million tons off my shoulders. The weight of carrying that burden was more than I could handle many days. I no longer assumed the responsibility for his sobriety.

I wrote a ninety day devotional for families in recovery, or those wanting to be. I looked for an inspirational book for myself, the parent of an addict, and didn't find anything so I wrote my own based on Jeremiah 30 and 31.

I offered hope and encouragement to other families that recovery is possible and sustainable.

How do we grow in the darkness of addiction? We take the next right step toward accepting we've been placed into a situation not of our choosing. We absorb the nourishment that's available, through heightened faith, 12 Step meetings, sponsors and the fellowship of like minded folks, and blossom in the light of recovery one day at a time.

Blessings and hope for today.

by Sharon Cosby



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



The Long Walk of Moms and Dads After Overdose

By Denise Cullen

It's a hard road, the one that we walk after our children die from a drug overdose. It's a walk that numbs your feet from the miles of isolation and grief. So many Orange County moms and dads are on this road now, too many of them. I'm only one of thousands. The White House is now trying to grapple with the problem (*In heroin fight, White House tries to break down walls between public health, police*, August 16, 2015), but they will likely fall short. A strategy that doesn't prioritize empowering people who use drugs to save their own lives and the lives of their peers by making the opiate overdose reversal medicine naloxone far more readily available to them is doomed to disappoint expectations. Ask a parent of a child who could have been saved by naloxone, they'll tell you.

Lost in the publicity around the White House's plan to reduce accidental drug overdose deaths are the faces and stories of our own sons and daughters, our friends and siblings, the people we knew who died from a drug overdose. They were smart, thoughtful, good people. I'm so tired of how we "other" them in our stories about drug addiction. My own son Jeff certainly didn't deserve to be "othered." He was athletic and charming; he was handsome and kind. His dad and I were very proud of him for turning into such a bright, lovely, young man. Heroin changed him in some ways, but in other ways he remained the loving, gentle person he always was.

He died in 2008 at the age of 27 from an accidental overdose. Our whole family had struggled to help him. It was a multi-year herculean effort that challenged everything we knew about being good parents. But my God we loved him, even through the worst of it, because we could still see our Jeff in there; in his darkness and struggle, we still saw our beautiful son.

After Jeff's death, my husband Gary and I made a life-altering, enormously positive decision. We decided to channel our energy towards connecting with others who had also experienced this kind of loss. We knew we would never recover from the loss of our son, but we also knew that there must be other families who, like us, had suffered the loss of their loved one. We started a GRASP chapter (*Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing*), a national support group. Two months later we took over the organization. When we began searching for others like us, we couldn't have known the magnitude of what we'd find.



Moms and dads all across Orange County and Southern California, looking for each other, coming together and building communities of strength where only sorrow had previously existed. We began to discuss how we could pass laws, the ones that could have saved our kids. Laws like the "911 Good Samaritan" law which encourages people to call for help at the scene of a suspected overdose without fear of arrest for drug violations. We met in living rooms, in restaurants, in backyards, and in support groups. We organized, we strategized, and we worked to help pass that law and then another one, one that makes the overdose reversal drug naloxone available in pharmacies without a prescription. And on one day every year, International Overdose Awareness Day, we all come together not just to mourn, but also to celebrate the incredible good that we've done and the fierce love for our kids that never fades and that drives us to keep going.



This year, we're walking, a walk of remembrance and unity, on the Huntington Beach Pier on August 30th at 6:00 p.m. Every year parents and loved ones all around the world find their way to a local Overdose Awareness Day event to meet others like them; to find comforting faces along their walk toward healing and strength.

For a parent, processing the grief, stigma, shame, and confusion of our child's overdose death is exhausting and arduous. It's a journey we never expected to take and when it came, we hadn't packed, we weren't prepared, and yet we were on our way. We were instantly catapulted down that road further away from life as we knew it and closer to a destination we hoped would provide at least some measure of respite when we arrived. As the loved ones left behind, we all walk that road. We walk it, but now we walk it together.

Denise Cullen, MSW, LCSW runs GRASP, an international organization for grief recovery after a substance passing (www.grasphelp.org), and is a founding member of Moms United to End the War on Drugs (www.momsunited.net). She and her husband founded Broken No More (www.broken-no-more.org), a non-profit support and advocacy organization. Denise and Gary live in Orange County.

Denise Cullen

Certified Grief Recovery Specialist and CEO, Broken No More





The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Saving Matt: Navigating a Broken System.

There is no instruction manual for mothers of addicts. We have all the information about what to expect when you are expecting and of course there is always Dr. Spock. My question is where do we turn when that perfect son grows up to become the perfect addict. The one who steals, lies and turns your life upside down. I searched far and wide for the instruction manual that would guide me step by step in this journey. Sadly I'm still looking.

Matt's addiction became mine as I took on the medical community in my quest to save him. If my son was diagnosed with cancer or diabetes our cries for help would have been answered with compassion. Insurance companies would have approved treatment in whatever state provided the best care. Because my son's disease was addiction we were set up for the battle of our lives. I found first hand the stigma that addiction carries taints even those in the so called profession of helping addicts.

I became Matt's medical advocate after sitting back and watching him struggle to plead for his life. When he finally was on board for rehab, which I learned is a very small window of time, I would monitor the call listening to the many obstacles the intake person on the other end of this cry for help would throw in his face. I had to bite my tongue and fight the urge to rip the phone from his hand and start screaming. Seeing and hearing his frustration was too much for me to bear. Foolishly, I thought they would never talk to his mother, a nurse, one of them, with such uncaring disrespect. Oh how wrong I was. The ignorance I encountered on a daily basis fueled my anger and opened my eyes to see how completely broken our system truly is. How would I ever get Matt into the right treatment facility when those running the places believed the stigma that we fought everyday.

My daily routine now became searching the internet. I was at the mercy of which ever rehab popped up. Which ever place had an available bed at that precious moment in time when Matt was ready to go. I'm ashamed to say the state we live in has no honest to God rehabs. We have two mental health facilities. One a full fledged mental hospital. Matt wasn't crazy, he was an addict. I was the crazy one trying to get him the help he needed to survive. I never thought to research the quality of the rehab that would accept both my son and my money. They all looked so beautiful and portrayed themselves as the best. We all know you grab the addict and run when they say yes, before the fear and withdraw start to creep in and you lose them once again.

No amount of crying and pleading for my son's life helped.

My desperate cries falling on uncaring, deaf ears. There were days I wanted to walk through their doors and demand help. My God, I was becoming a crazy mother of an addict desperate for help.

I felt like I won the lottery when I was put on hold and then asked how far away are you we will hold a bed. Finally, after weeks of frustration Matt was in rehab. My peace was so short lived as my new battle became the insurance companies. Twenty some days, really, are you kidding me, I fought for months and this is all we get. My mind already beat up, now having to gear up for my next battle.

Insurance companies have no clue. My son didn't become an addict in 28 days and he certainly wasn't ready to face the real world in such a short period of time. Twenty eight days for most addicts is like spitting into the wind. No amount of begging, pleading or providing them with facts relating to longer admissions leading to less relapses changed their closed minds. Replies were always spoken in that I don't care about your addict tone of voice. I now believe after living this nightmare that insurance companies need to be educated about addiction. Saving lives instead of money. Maybe in the perfect world.

Looking back I wish I could have made one phone call. I wish there was someone on the other end that cared. I wish I could have spent that time loving my son instead of fighting whoever answered the phone at which ever rehab happened to pop up on my screen. I wish insurance companies understood addiction as the chronic disease it is. I wish I had someone to vent my frustrations to. No one wants to hear about your fight to save your addict son. Isolation became my friend as people ran when they saw me coming. I wish someone said I'll help you.

The system needs to be structured to help both the addict and the frantic mothers searching for high quality, affordable rehab facilities. It needs to be run by people who get it. Addicts helping addicts. Mothers of addicts helping each other navigate this horrible journey no one signs up for. We are mothers of a generation suffering from the most mistreated and misunderstood disease.

It's too late for me and Matt. The system failed us. He is gone and I'm trying to pick up the pieces. I relive every horrible moment of my struggle to save him. As a nurse I am ashamed of the medical community and how addicts are treated. Medical and nursing schools must include addiction in the curriculum. Pain management clinics must be closely monitored preventing turning patients into addicts. Rehabs must expand their beds and have policies in place to never turn away an addict requesting help. My path is now to save other mothers children. I will use the lessons I've learned through my journey to make changes. To speak out against the stigma of addiction. A broken mother living her life to honor her son.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



Our hidden problem !

Nothing has such a devastating affect on our families like Family Addiction. Most family members never even think about addiction in this way. Why would we. We aren't the person that is using. For some it can be years before they realize that they are also a part of it.

Many family members say that the only problem in the family unit is the one that is using, but this is far from the truth. Denial has a big part in this. The bad affects are there even if you don't want to believe it. Here are a few signs:



1. Does my spouse and I fight more. Do we have a really hard time agreeing on what needs to be done?
2. Do the other members of the family feel left out because their sibling gets all the attention. Are they acting out when they never did it before?
3. Are you losing sleep to the point it's affecting others.
4. Are others in the family covering the problems up so no one else in the family knows?

There are many more examples but the bottom line is: If a love one in your family is suffering from addiction then so is the family unit.

What can we do to get rid of the problems that come with Family Addiction all together? The truth of the matter is we can't get rid of it, we can only minimize the affect of the family.

Each person in the family unit will need to come to terms with the damage that's been caused by both the user and other family members. This isn't easy and some never do. The nightmare is played out daily as what has become a dysfunctional family with some hiding, some running and some fighting. It was one of our biggest nightmares.

Well what can we do? Here are few things we can work on.

1. First the parents must be on the same page. This is really important. When we're not, it sends mixed messages and it also gives our love one the opportunity to play each one on the other. If you can't do this then offer up going to counseling. Also please find a meeting for you. It shows to the using love one you're serious.
2. Take time with the other family members. Do something with them. Please don't talk about your love one with them unless they bring it up. This is suppose to be their special time together. Find joy in it.

3. Find time for yourself. Don't sit at home and continue down the path of depression because that is what it will turn into. You're only hurting, robbing yourself and doing no one any good. Take the time to do something you like. Get your nails done, fishing or whatever it is.

4. We can only change us. That's all we're truly in charge of. So let's work on what we can do about us and the remaining family members.

I've seen divorce, damaged relationships with our children, sickness both mentally and physically come from family addiction. But we can do something about it before it's to late. Stand up - You do Matter !

Ed Brazell

The Hurricane of Addiction

My name is Nancy and I work as a para-professional with special education children in Long Beach, New York. Each day I walk in my classroom and feel sad for those children whose lives may be taken away by the wrong choices. Once, my child, Jesse, was so full of life too. How I wish I could go back!

Not a day goes by that I don't wonder what my son would be doing if he were still on this earth. He was a talented wrestler for his high school, a talented drummer from a very early age, and had a gift of making people laugh.



Jesse was diagnosed as ADHD very early in life. His energy and wit were contagious, but in school it was an issue. He felt different even during the short period of time where he took his medicine as prescribed.

Jesse stopped his ADHD medicine and, I believe, started self medicating with Xanax and Valium. I searched and searched for a rehab that took 15-year-olds, but after 10 days in the facility I found, our insurance refused to pay. I had to bring him home. I didn't have the financial capability to keep him there for a month. I believe that was his one his chance at life, before his addiction progressed.

He tried again and again, and the ups and downs went on and on. My hope of him being able to stop was diminishing. I used to fear that I would get a phone call every time the phone rang. His brothers tried to talk to him, but he hid his ongoing addiction from everyone.

When Jesse was 19, Hurricane Sandy hit our town. At that time, he was in recovery for two years. Within minutes, our house was 75-percent destroyed. All our possessions on the first floor were destroyed and our cars were gone. I spent the next year trying to find ways to fix my house back up and make sure all my sons had transportation to get to college.



The Compassionate Friends of Metrowest



(continued from last page)

I was also looking for a job, as the hospital I worked in at that time was destroyed and condemned.

In the middle of it all, Jesse relapsed. Jesse confided in me that his addiction to OxyContin had turned into a heroin addiction: it was easier to find and cheaper. Once again, I found myself writing letters to rehabs. I tried everyone, even the President of the United States and Eric Clapton, who owns a rehab. I was desperate and Jesse was too. My bank account was wiped out, between the rehabs and the storm. All I wanted was my son back!

After a short stay at a rehab in Florida, he remained in recovery for about four months. He was so happy to be home. He rode his bike on the boardwalk, played his drums, hung out with his brothers and friends, and even praised my home cooked meals. Life seemed normal again.

But on Thursday, December 12, 2013, Jesse came to talk to me. He was noticeably high. My heart sank. I decided for once not to talk with him or nag him in any way, and just keep the peace. I had every intention of having a talk with him the next morning. But on Friday, I was still upset so I went straight to work instead.

My phone kept vibrating in my pocket and I walked into a hallway to look at it. It was a text from my son, Zach. Mom, pick up your phone. Mom, Jesse is dead in his bed!

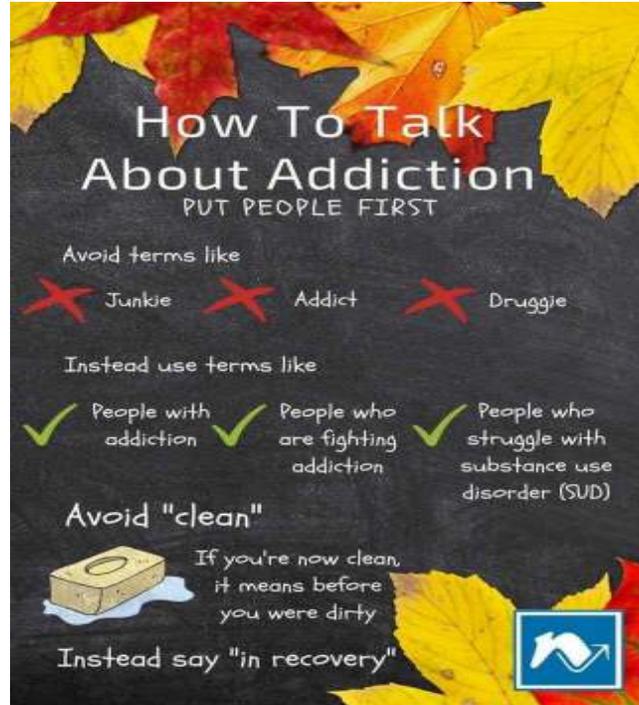


That is the day my heart broke forever. I am still broken and miss my child more and more each day that passes. I am still angry with our health insurance system and the lack of rehabs for all ages.

It will be four years this December that I lost my sweet, kind, funny boy. I am crying right now at the thought of never seeing him again. His addiction killed him and affected everyone in my family. His addiction wiped us out financially.

But I would do it all again, for him. I love you, Jesse Mark Barnett: always and forever.

*Nancy Rossetti
Blog, People Facing Addiction
Oct. 16, 2017*



Internet Help

Grief Recovery After a Substance passing: grasp.org
Local, (Kathy Leonard) metrowestgrasp@gmail.com

Helping People Find Therapists: goodtherapy.org

Open To Hope:
www.opentohope.com/when-a-child-dies-of-drug-addiction

FAN (Family Against Narcotics):
fan@familiesagainstnarcotics.org

Grief and Substance Abuse-Coping After a Loss:
<https://www.elementsbehavioralhealth.com>

The Fix: thefix.com (also has a page on Face Book)

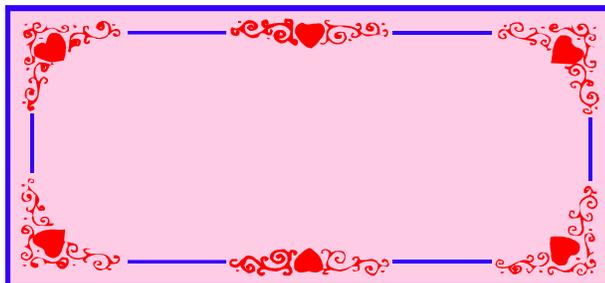
The Addict's Mom: addictsmom.com (also has a page on Face Book)

Government web page: www.drugabuse.gov

Loss of a Child-Helping a Grieving Parent:
www.allpsychologycareers.com

Support Groups-Grief Watch-Home Page:
<https://www.griefwatch.com/support-groups>

The Compassionate Friends
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This special newsletter is printed in loving
memory of *Scott Francis Motuzas*
June 12, 1962 - July 9, 1993

Address Correction Requested

TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

Coming to your first meeting is the hardest thing to do. But you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Try not to judge your first meeting as to whether or not TCF will work for you. The second, third, or fourth meeting might be the time you will find the right person - or just the right words said that will help you in your grief work.



TO OUR OLD MEMBERS

*We need your encouragement and support. You are the string that ties our group together and the glue that makes it stick. Each meeting we have new parents. **THINK BACK...** what would it have been like for you if there had not been any "oldies" to welcome you, share your grief, and encourage you? It was from them you heard, "your pain will not always be this bad; it really does get softer."*