



The Compassionate Friends

Fargo/Moorhead Area Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

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June 2020

Volume 37 Number 6

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Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, we have decided for the safety of our members to cancel chapter meetings and Mom meetings for the summer.

We hope to resume meetings in September.

. The Walk to Remember has also been canceled this year.

LOVE GIFTS

Joan & Steve Halland in memory of their son, Cole Halland

Revenia Nelson in memory of her son, Charles Nelson

We are deeply grateful for the LOVE GIFTS given this month.

Our chapter and all chapters are financed solely through your Love Gifts.

Donations make this newsletter, postage, books, tapes, etc. possible.

Thank you for your tax-deductible gifts.

Hugs From Heaven

by Anonymous

When you feel a gentle breeze

Caress you when you sigh

It's a hug sent from Heaven

From a loved one way up high

If a soft and tender raindrop

Lands upon your nose

They've added a small kiss

As fair as a rose

If a song you hear fills you

With a feeling of sweet love

It's a hug sent from Heaven

From someone special up above

If you awaken in the morning

To a bluebird's chirping song

It's music sent from Heaven

To cheer you all day long

If tiny little snowflakes

Land upon your face

It's a hug sent from Heaven

Trimmed with Angel lace

So keep the joy in your heart

If you're lonely my dear friend

Hugs that are sent from Heaven

A broken heart will mend

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. The children we mourn have died at all ages and from many different causes, but our love for them 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, creeds, and relationships. 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 they feel helpless and see no hope. Some of us have found our faith to be a source of strength, while some of us are struggling to find answers. Some of us are angry, filled with guilt or in deep depression, while others radiate an inner peace. But whatever pain we bring to this gathering of The Compassionate Friends, it is pain we will share, just as we share with each other our love for the children who have died. We are all seeking and struggling to build a future for ourselves, but we are committed to building a future together. We reach out to each other in love to 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. ©2007

TCF Balloon Release

These balloons launched on this special memorable day

Are for our children - those of yesterday.

For those who were taken from this earth.

Those we loved dearly from the time of their birth.

At this time and every day of the year Our hearts yearn deeply for them to be here.

Time without them has been long and tough

Cherished memories now have to be enough.

The balloons we release with colors so bold

For yesterday's children those we long to hold.

We ask over and over as we sit and cry Why did our children have to die?

Balloons released way up in the air for your children taken does not seem fair.

the miracle of birth and the mystery of death

Belong to God as we take yet another breath.

Thank you, Lord, for friends and family gathered here

And knowing our children are also always near.

Our thoughts those of times now past

And yet only heartache and yearning seem to last

But these balloons floating way up in the sky

Give Assurance to use that our angels do indeed fly.

Ballons present and past symbolize times of fun, Love and joy.

And our greatest wish is to hold and hug a girl or young boy.

Bless us Lord for all your gifts

And strength and courage as we remember those we miss.

Balloons also symbolize birthdays and gifts, or Christmas gifts

Placed under a tree.

But the greatest gift of all is "to You and Me."

On this special occasion as balloons soar up with a silent hush.

All of us here today experience the gift of love - "to You and to Us."

SUMMER DELIGHT

Where is the child who skipped through the sprays of summer rain and laughed his way into my heart? Where is the boy who climbed my trees and spied on me from behind the leaves? Where is the child with the suntanned legs who ran Fourth-of-July races in green parks? Where is the sleepy child who wrapped his arms around my neck and said, “When I grow up, I gonna marry you, Mom?” He’s here.

He twines around our past, around my future, and takes me back home, and makes me young again as sure as summer comes. A suntanned spirit with an impish grin still whispers in my ear that stars are not stars at all but lightening bugs he’s captured in a jar. In his youth he’s my summer’s glow, the sunshine in my garden, my comfort on long, hot, summer nights of remembering.

Where is the child that once played among my summer flowers? He darts and runs away as I idly dream of yesterday, at once elusive yet so near. Oh, I’m sure he’s here. I’m sure I saw him just a minute ago. Or was it just a touch of summer madness that made me think I’d greeted him?

Oh, where is that child of summer gladness? His laughter slides down summer rainbows and captures me with unbound glee. His summer brownness runs barefoot on my heart. With sun-bleached hair, he smiles at me from photos from summers past, and I remember love.

~ Fay Harden, TCF/Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Helping a Father through Father's Day

Father’s Day has become a traditional holiday celebrated by many with gifts, cards, family gatherings, and perhaps even a special dinner out just for daddy. Stores begin advertising for Father’s Day weeks in advance of the actual holiday. The scenes in advertisements and cards always depict a loving father with a child snuggled close to that special man called daddy.

Many fathers, however, have experienced the devastation of losing a child, and there seems to be an almost nonexistent recognition of the fact that fathers suffer from feelings of lost dreams, loneliness, failure, and loss of identity when a child has died. Very rarely are comments of support made to the father in a family when a child has died. For some reason, our society seems to be more in tune to the feelings of the pain a mother experiences during child loss. Fathers are somehow expected to be stronger emotionally, and they are expected to heal much sooner.

What can be done to show support on Father’s Day to a father who has experienced the deep pain of losing a child? Probably the most appreciated gesture of support would be to acknowledge the fact that the father is still a father even though his child is no longer living on this earth. Refer to him as a father, and express your genuine sorrow for his loss. Fathers who have lost a child as early as miscarriage should certainly be included among the group of grieving fathers. Often, fathers of miscarried babies are never given any recognition of being a father.

Finding a Father’s Day card specifically for fathers who have lost a child can be next to impossible. If you cannot find a card with an appropriate verse, choose a blank card and write your own message from the heart. “Sharing in your sorrow this Father’s Day” or “Blessings to you this Father’s Day as God watches over your heavenly angel” will show a tremendous amount of compassion and support to a father who is grieving the loss of a child on Father’s Day.

Recognize the fact that fathers go through emotional upheavals during the grief of child loss. Fathers grieve differently than mothers, so they might not want a lot of special treatment on Father’s Day. Men are generally less apt to talk about their feelings of hurt and loss than women, but those feelings are still there and need to be recognized. Father’s Day without a child can be just as emotionally heartbreaking for a father as Mother’s Day is for a mother without her child. We need to be sensitive to the needs of fathers, too!

Special holidays stir up many different emotions for fathers, and Father’s Day is a particularly difficult holiday to go through following the loss of a child. With help and support from family and friends, a father can move forward in his grief. By letting a father know that he has not been forgotten on Father’s Day, you will validate his identity as a father, and you will allow him the special privilege of once again being called that most cherished name of all—daddy.

Finally, find some way to validate the fact that a father is still a father even though his child is not living. Fathers are by nature “fixers” and the loss of a child is one loss that cannot be fixed. This fact is often very hard for a man to accept. By giving a card and a personal word on Father’s Day, you will help validate to the father that he is still honored among that special group of men called fathers on Father’s Day. Validation of fatherhood on Father’s Day is one more step forward in this process we call grief.

Clara Hinton | Jun 08, 2003-Brief Encounters Online Newsletter-www.briefencounters.org

The Butterfly in Our Lives

Most often we hear, in our Compassionate Friends circles, of the butterfly representing the lives of our children who have died. Their spirit lives on and our memories live on, often in fleeting moments. But I think the butterfly’s life cycle — metamorphosis could just as easily represent our own lives. We seem to fit the four stages of the cycle. 1) THE EGG: When we are small, we are protected, changing, and living in a somewhat small and safe world — much like the butterfly egg attached to a leaf somewhere. 2) THE CATERPILLAR: The caterpillar is much like our lives before the death of our child or children. We go through the day doing what we need to do. We grow a lot and we change somewhat slowly. We devour many things in daily life — work, church, Little League. And then the child is gone. We change. 3) THE COCOON: After the death of our child, we shut ourselves off from so much because of our grief. We often encase ourselves in the blanket of grief and depression —that is what protects us from the horrible pain. 4) THE BUTTERFLY: The pain lessens, and we begin to heal as we work through the grief process, and we begin to see a ray of light — a little color. Some of the weight is removed. We break open our cocoon and begin to reach out ever so slightly and touch life again, just to see if it will hurt too much. As we discover the brighter days and brilliant colors of life, we become more like the butterfly. We are free to once again be a part of life and we can move about more easily and begin to take some of the nectar from life.

~ Dale Tallant, TCF/Tulare, CA

A Father Speaks

Driving to work with the radio on, I sit next to a fellow co-worker and friend in the passenger seat. It's early in the morning, and the conversation is light. A song reminds me of Jesse, my deceased son, so I tell a story about Jesse. A cloud of silence and dread fills the car. My friend shifts his position, and I can feel how uncomfortable he is. I swallow the memories of Jesse and switch the conversation to last night's ball game. Sound familiar? It's painful to your friends to hear about your deceased child, and it's painful for you to silence your memories, too.

Certain studies claim that women are social beings and are more able to communicate their emotions than are men. The same studies state that men are mostly competitive and tend to hide their negative emotions, such as sadness or grief, especially from other men. Does that mean that men have less need to deal with their emotions? I don't think so. From personal experiences and experiences of other men whom I have known, grief is one emotion that *demand*s relief. Without grief recovery, grief can become a destructive force that at some point can consume you—your physical as well as your mental and spiritual health.

Bereavement support groups remind us that we need not walk alone. From a man's viewpoint, I think our support group's monthly gatherings offer an important avenue for men to work through the grief recovery process. Other doors are often shut to men who need to discuss their anger, guilt, sadness, and even happy memories concerning their deceased children. Let's talk with and listen to each other.

~ Jim Hobbs, Bereaved Parents of North Texas

Grandparents are a Special Gift

Grandparents are a special gift...
God gives them to each child.
Their love outshines the brightest star...
Their love can never be defiled.
Oh, but when a child becomes an angel,
Grandparents feel the pain and sorrow.
Beyond any pain they've known in life,
Or will ever come to know tomorrow.
For a grandparent holds a special love
For the child their child has had.
And to lose what they hold dear...
Leaves them heartbroken and sad.
Their legacy is their grandchildren...
So how can they learn to survive?
Will the dreams of their tomorrows
Somehow be kept alive?
Yes, a grandparent is a survivor...
And life has taught them how to be.

Author unknown, TCF/Greenville, SC

Sound Familiar?

I seem to be falling apart. My attention span can be measured in seconds, my patience in minutes, and I cry at the drop of a hat. I forget things constantly. The morning toast burns daily. I forget to sign my checks. Half of everything in the house is misplaced. Anxiety and restlessness are my constant companions. Rainy days seem extra dreary. Sunny days seem an outrage. Other people's pain and frustration seem insignificant. Laughing, happy people seem out of place in my world. I am normal, I am told. I am a newly grieving person.

~ Eloise Cold, TCF/Phoenix, AZ

My 3 Gifts For Lexi

I gift to you a bucket, to hold a bucket full of tears,
I've shed for you while grieving
These past long, long three years.

I gift to you a special place, in the corner of my mind.
For you to stay forever,
and pop out from time to time.

And, I gift to you that little piece, of my aching heart,
That you took along with you
When we had to part.

For I have plenty more tears, and my mind has lots of space.
And, my heart is scarring over.
It forms a mask to hide my face.

These little things I gift to you, please accept them with my love.
And I know that you are forever near.
Whether spirit, or angel above.

~ Jim Wells, TCF/Jefferson City, MO
In Memory of my daughter, Lexi

"People Like Us"

"People Like Us," will answer "Doing okay"
"People Like Us," what else can we say?
"People Like Us," have experienced the loss of a young child.
"People Like Us," are "The Other People" - "That it Happened to"
"People Like Us," fear it may happen to you.
"People Like Us," endure a life forever changed.
"People Like Us," wonder if we are to be blamed.
"People Like Us," have experienced the pain of fate.
"People Like Us," will never forget that date.
"People Like Us," know the loss is real.
"People Like Us," understand, the way we each feel.
"People Like Us," felt normal until then.
"People Like Us," always wonder what could have been?
"People Like Us," hold on to our sorrow.
"People Like Us," have little concern for tomorrow.
"People Like Us," feel guilty while healing.
"People Like Us," wonder if life, we are stealing.
"People Like Us," our grief, we attempt to contain.
"People like Us," often feel grief, we cannot restrain.
"People Like Us," wish that just one minute had changed.
"People Like Us," would like to see fate rearranged.
"People Like Us," we are different, you know.
"People Like Us," now watch other kids grow.
"People Like Us," we always pray,
"Thank you, God! For the days you let my child stay!"
"Please God!

With my child, please let me have just one more day!"

~Donald Moyers, TCF/Galveston County TX

"Compassion is not a relationship between the healer and the wounded. It's a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. What gets me up and going each day is knowing that how I live my life and treat others will be the only reflection and definition of my son that people who never met him will ever get to see."

~Tanya Pearce

OUR BELOVED CHILDREN REMEMBERED *BIRTHDAYS*

CHILD		PARENTS
LORETTE "LORY" ANDERSON.....	60.....	KENDRID & PHYLLIS LEINE
KEVIN SCOTT COWDEN.....	46.....	WALTER & KARIE COWDEN
RILEY MARK DAHLBERG.....	17.....	BLAKE & CHRISTINA DAHLBERG
JULIE M ERICKSON.....	51.....	JANET ERICKSON
WANDA (HINTZ) HAGEN.....	47.....	DARLENE SIMONSON
HAZEL JANE HALL.....	3.....	JORDAN UST & NATHAN HALL
DAVID MICHAEL HELFTER.....	52.....	MARK & HELLA HELFTER
MARC T HENDERSON.....	52.....	TOM & LINDA HENDERSON
VICKY HOLWEGER.....	67.....	ROSEMARY FESKE
JACOB LABER.....	34.....	DEBRA LABER
GAIL DIANE LARSON.....	62.....	DALE & MARILYN LARSON
STEVEN J NEWARK JR.....	38.....	JANET & JOHN OURADNIK
ASHLEY PERRINE.....	29.....	BRAD & BRENDA MERGENS
CHERYL L SAMSON.....	57.....	HENRY (DUKE) & PATRICIA SAMSON
DOUG E SCHENCK.....	56.....	HAROLD & IRENE SCHENCK
LOLA ELISE SINCLAIR.....	5.....	ANDREA & TJADEN SINCLAIR
ADAM JOSEPH SNYDER.....	37.....	ANNE SNYDER
JANE N SNYDER.....	59.....	JIM & PHILOMENA NELSON
LARISSA UNGER.....	29.....	JON & CYNTHIA UNGER

ANNIVERSARIES

CHILD		PARENTS
DEREK R CHURCH.....	1.....	KELLY CHURCH
WILLIAM "BILL" COWDEN.....	6.....	WALTER & KARIE COWDEN
DAVID GRAFSGAARD.....	13.....	BERDINE GRAFSGAARD
HAZEL JANE HALL.....	3.....	JORDAN UST & NATHAN HALL
KENT ALAN HANSEN.....	4.....	DOUGLAS HANSEN
ALIVIA PAIGE MORTENSON.....	1.....	DANIELLE MORTENSON
CHARLES "CHUCK" NELSON.....	2.....	REVENIA NELSON
RYAN DEAN NELSON.....	21.....	BECKY NELSON
PAUL A OLSON.....	4.....	SHIRLEY OLSON
LOGAN F RINKE.....	5.....	PAULINE RINKE
TRAVIS JON MICHAEL ROBINSON.....	2.....	LARRY & MARY LEE ROBINSON
JOSEPH PETER ROEL.....	13.....	BOB & SANDI ROEL
JANE N SNYDER.....	5.....	JIM & PHILOMENA NELSON
TYLER JAMES THOEMKE.....	17.....	JAMIE & SHERI THOEMKE
ASHLEY WIGER.....	6.....	LARRY & LORI WIGER

Please check out our Chapter website's page for 'Our Beloved Children'
(www.tcffargomoorhead.org/ourchildren.html). If you would like your child's picture and a poem or story posted on this page, please submit them to us at tcf1313@hotmail.com or mail them to our PO Box (listed on the back of the newsletter). Photos and poems/stories sent to the PO Box will be electronically scanned and then returned to you so please remember to include a return address

Memories are like threads of gold,
they never tarnish or grow old.

How Kids Grieve

Two years ago my brother-in-law died unexpectedly of a pulmonary embolism. He was just 40, and he left behind two young children and his wife, my husband's sister. Our family was dazed with shock and grief, barely able to function. How could we explain to our three-year-old daughter what had happened, when just days before she had been tumbling around our living room with her cousins and Uncle Emil?

I must have stumbled through some sort of explanation, although I can't recall the words I used. I do remember thinking that I was doing it all wrong. Everything I said seemed false or incomplete or too frightening for a toddler.

I now know I wasn't alone in feeling this way. Death, according to several experts, has replaced sex as the topic parents have the hardest time discussing with their children.

“How do we tell the kids?”

“The main thing is to keep it simple and the younger the child, the simpler your explanation should be,” says John Schowalter, M.D., professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center, in New Haven, Connecticut. “It's important to use the correct vocabulary,” adds Helen Fitzgerald, coordinator of The Grief Program at the Mount Vernon Center for Community Mental Health, in Alexandria, Virginia. “Avoid ‘she expired’ or ‘we lost him.’ Use the real words: ‘dead,’ ‘funeral,’ ‘cancer,’ ‘heart attack,’ or ‘AIDS.’ “You might say, for example, “Grandma had a very bad heart attack and died.”

Encourage their questions.

After telling your child the facts, as briefly and honestly as possible, it is best to turn the floor over to her. Ask whether there is anything she wants to know. Don't be concerned if she does not respond right away. “As is true with sex and other emotionally charged areas, the discussion often works best if you give your child time to think and then to ask questions. Make it clear that she's free to come back to you later,” says Schowalter.

Although parents tend to think that they should “be strong” when they deliver the bad news—so as not to frighten or upset their child—experts agree that crying in front of your child is both normal and healthy. “We should allow ourselves to be human. This is not easy to do. We can tell our children that we hurt a great deal when someone dies. Even if we can't find the right words, we can say that we aren't thinking as clearly as we would like because of our sadness,” suggests Phyllis Silverman, Ph.D., an associate in social welfare in the Department of Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, and principal investigator in an ongoing study of child bereavement. “Younger children may not be able to understand the full range of feelings and emotions that adults or older children have. With an older child, it may be possible to share some of the feelings you have and to invite her into a dialogue. Together, then both parent and child can develop a better understanding of what's happening.”

John W. James, who founded the Grief Recovery Institute in Los Angeles in 1981 after a son died, wholeheartedly agrees. “The most helpful thing adults can do for children is to be emotionally honest about their own feelings,” he says. It's not always easy to be emotionally honest, however, because most of us have been coached since childhood to keep a stiff upper lip and to go to our rooms to cry. “A child who sees this immediately thinks there must be something wrong with crying,” James continues. “If, on the other hand, we could just stand in the kitchen and cry, our children could come up and ask, ‘What's wrong?’ We could then say, ‘Grandpa just died and I'm very sad.’ Then you have the beginnings of an emotionally honest conversation about grief.”

“Mommy, what's ‘dead’?”

After stumbling through telling my daughter that Uncle Emil had died, I learned that children's simplest questions can be the hardest to answer. Rebecca's was “Mommy, what's ‘dead’?” I hesitantly said something about not breathing and hearts not beating—feeling hopelessly inadequate for this terrible task. “I think that's all you need to say,” Silverman affirms. “Dead” is when all functions stop—you don't breathe, you can't see.” Grief counselor Helen Fitzgerald describes a simple yet powerful game she used with one group of five- to twelve-year-olds. “I

started by saying, ‘I'm alive, I can stomp my feet,’” she says. “The kids got into this immediately, saying things like, “I'm alive, I can cross my eyes,’ and even some gross and silly things like, ‘I'm alive. I can pick my nose.’ Then, after we'd gone around the room, I said, “When all of that is gone, that is what ‘dead’ is, at least as we know it here on this earth. It got really quiet for a few minutes. They weren't upset; they were just letting it sink in.”

“Is she in heaven?”

Whether or not religious beliefs enter into the discussion with your child is entirely up to you. Parents should simply tell their children what they believe,” says Elizabeth Weller, M.D., director of child and adolescent psychiatry at Ohio State University, in Columbus, Ohio. “You shouldn't tell children about life after death if you don't believe in it yourself. It's also fine to simply say, ‘some people believe this and some people believe that, but I don't really know what happens.’”

That's the approach Phyllis Silverman took with her own child. “When my son was five, he asked what happens after people die,” she recalls. “I told him that I didn't really know that some people believe nothing happens—the body returns to nature and nourishes the soil and we live on in people's memories. Some people believe we go to heaven and they see heaven in a very concrete way. And others simply believe that in some way the spirit lives on. My son thought for a while, and then said, “I think I believe that somehow your soul lives on. And that was the end of it. That was all he I needed to hear.”

Fitzgerald, who has new book out called *The Grieving Child* (Fireside) adds one caveat: “I think we have to be careful about such comments as God loved her so much he took her”—as if God goes around zapping people and they're gone.” Schowalter agrees it can be confusing. If you've been told that Grandpa has gone to heaven and that heaven is a wonderful place, then why are all of these people crying?” Of course, Grandpa is still missed in this life, and it may help to explain that to your child.

When can children really understand death?

Children ask questions; parents try to answer. But just how old does a child have to be for the reality of death to truly sink in?

John Schowalter says, “People argue about this, but it’s probably somewhere around age ten that death is understood to be irreversible. “Of course, there are no hard-and-fast rules. “There are some five-year-olds who will not have a hard time grasping death in its true sense—that death is a one-way trip, that you go and never come back,” says Weller. Adds Silverman, “I do think kids understand much earlier than we realize, especially if they’ve had an experience with an actual death. This doesn’t mean that ten minutes later they won’t ask, ‘When’s Papa coming back?’ but I think that’s a kind of reality testing.”

How much it hurts.

How deeply a child will be affected by a death depends on several factors other than age.

Losing a grandmother who lives down the street, a close school friend, or a cousin who plays with the child every weekend is likely to be felt deeply.

On the other hand, if the child has not had a significant relationship with the person who died, she may not feel the loss intensely, notes John James.

Older children, however, may have a strong reaction to the death of a relative they weren’t close to. They may feel sadness that the chance to know that person, and to have that person know them, is gone.

Children’s secret fears.

A few months after the death of her great grandmother, and about a year after her Uncle Emil died, my daughter, Rebecca, dropped a bombshell. “Is it almost time for Daddy to die?” she asked quite matter-of-factly as I drove her to nursery school one sunny spring day.

“What? Good grief—of course not!” I sputtered.

Had I said the right thing? How could I promise my child that our family would be spared, when tragedy had struck so close to home?

“You might have said, ‘Daddy is very healthy, and he and I will do everything we can to stay that way. We are probably going to live a long time, until you are all grown up,’” says Helen Fitzgerald. “You could say it’s rare that someone as young as Uncle Emil dies.”

Weller suggests pointing out that “not all daddies die” and mentioning some friends whose families are intact. She adds that it’s very common for children to worry that someone close to them, of the same sex and age as the deceased, will also die.

There are several other fears that these experts say are common after a death has occurred:

- A child may worry that somehow she made the person die. “You have to give a lot of reassurance that thoughts and words don’t kill,” says Fitzgerald. If a child has thought about getting rid of a pesky cousin—or told her grandfather in a fit of anger that she wished he were dead—and that person dies soon afterward, the child may hold herself responsible.
- Death, darkness, and sleep also seem to be universally linked. “Darkness is a time when children fear someone’s going to come and get them—and anthropomorphically speaking, death does come and get you,” says Schowalter.
- “Since death might be thought of as the ultimate punishment, the idea of death as retribution for bad actions or thoughts is very common,” adds Schowalter. A child may, then, ask what the dead person did wrong or whether he was bad. The child may worry that he’s going to die too—since all kids know they’ve done some pretty bad things in their time.
- Older children worry about their own deaths, Weller comments. She recommends saying something like, “It is true that someday everybody will die. But usually death is due to the aging process or a serious illness, and you are still very young and healthy.”

Helping children handle complicated feelings.

How can we know if a child is harboring one or another of these fears?

Sometimes it’s obvious. “Often if a child does not master the process of understanding this complicated issue, he will bring the subject up over and over again,” says Weller. “The parents might think, ‘Oh my god, is this child obsessed?’” But he is just trying to make sense of what happened.”

Other children will suddenly start playing funeral, hospital, or car crash. “This doesn’t mean they are cruel or that they are having fun with a subject that causes the rest of us pain,” says Weller. “Play is the work of childhood. Through it all, they try to understand and master what we teach them.”

Talking is often a good way for children to sort through issues they don’t understand, although some children just aren’t comfortable talking about feelings. “The easiest way to help your child to talk is for you to go first,” suggests John James. You might start by saying, “I really feel bad that I never told Grandpa how much fun I had when we went to that basketball game together,” and then ask, “Is there anything you wish you had said—or hadn’t said—to him?” Having your child write a letter to his grandfather and then read it either at the grave or to a photograph of him can help lay this type of nagging regret to rest.

Helen Fitzgerald suggests getting younger children to draw “something they wish they’d done differently. If something’s making a child feel bad and she can’t get it out, it becomes a deep, dark secret.”

Books can help too. One that Fitzgerald uses in her kids’ bereavement groups is *The Tenth Good Thing About Barney* (Aladdin Books), about a child who counts the reasons he loved his dead cat. “I read that a lot,” she says, “and then I ask the children to think of ten things about the person who died, but I do tell them that the things don’t all have to be good. Not all memories are happy. It’s a relief for children to know that it’s okay to remember the not so great stuff too.”

What about the funeral?

Funerals are an important way of paying respect and saying good-bye to someone when he dies—what experts term a “conclusionary ritual.” But how can a parent know whether this ceremony will be good for a child or too frightening and upsetting?

“There’s a wide diversity of opinion about this,” says John Schowalter. “In studies I’ve done, I’ve found that children under nine or ten tended to be quite disturbed about funerals—but only if they were forced to go. It is my feeling that the decision should be left to them. If your child doesn’t want to go, she should not be made to feel that she is abandoning anyone or doing something wrong.”

If your child does want to go, she needs to know what she’s getting into. You need to tell her, briefly what’s going to happen—whether there will be a casket present, for example, and whether it will be open or closed. Be sure to tell her that people will be crying—even Mom and Dad—because they’re sad. Then answer any questions, keeping it simple, advises Fitzgerald. Also let your child know that she can leave the service at any time if she needs to.

Taking your child to the burial is even more problematic, according to Schowalter. “For the child who is not really sure that dead people are going to stay dead—and again, this tends to mean younger than age ten or so—seeing someone put in the ground in a box and covered with dirt is a lot to handle.”

Cremation can seem awfully frightening, although Fitzgerald comments that the children she has counseled have no particular trouble with the concept—as long as it’s presented sensitively and simply, with additional details provided only as asked for. If a young child is attending only a memorial service, you may not need to broach the topic at all. Older children and those who are exposed to the planning of a cremation, tend to be interested in how it’s done (“in a large kiln, lined with fireproof bricks so that intense heat causes the body to become ashes); what the ashes look like afterward (“light gray flour, about the size of a five pound bag”); and what will be done with them.

If a child decides against going to the funeral, then later regrets her decision, reassure her that at the time, she made the best decision. “You might then arrange a special ceremony,” suggests Fitzgerald. This could be something as simple as a poem read at church, or flowers and a letter taken to the grave.

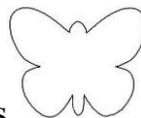
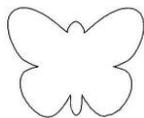
Sometimes a simple ceremony of the child’s own devising can be particularly fitting. Fitzgerald mentions one that the children in her group came up with: “Yesterday each of them wrote a message on a silver helium balloon to the person who had died. We picked a spot in the parking lot, under a tree, and planned a very simple ceremony. We all held the string, counted to three, and, as we let the balloon go, said together, ‘We sure hope this gets to you!’ We watched the balloon until we could no longer see it.” Of course, she says, “we had talked about how the balloon couldn’t really get to the people we wrote to, but also how doing stuff like this makes us feel better anyway. And it did.”

Jennifer Cadoff is a free-lance writer specializing in health and family issues and is the mother of two preschoolers.

~ Jennifer Cadoff

From **Parents Magazine**, April 1993

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Butterfly Decals

“Butterflies are the heaven sent kisses of an angel.” ~ Author Unknown

Butterfly decals are available to help personalize our trailer. The trailer is used to carry items to and from our Walk to Remember and other chapter events. It has also given us some visibility in the Fargo/Moorhead community. Each butterfly decal holds the first and last name of one of our beloved children.

Butterflies are available in five colors (yellow, pink, red, blue and green). The cost is as follows: \$25 for 1 butterfly, \$50 for 2 butterflies, \$65 for 3 butterflies and \$80 for 4 butterflies. If you wish to purchase more than 4 butterflies, please contact Paul and Kara Bailey at 701-491-0364.

Butterfly orders should include the child’s first and last name (middle name is optional) and the color of the butterfly. Checks should be made payable to TCF of Fargo-Moorhead and the order mailed to PO Box 10686, Fargo, ND 58106.

We must have your written permission on file to use your child’s name in the newsletter. Permission may be withdrawn at any time by written request. This information is used to maintain our Chapter Database. It is confidential and is only utilized for Chapter activities such as the newsletter.

Your Name: _____

Child’s Name: _____ Relationship: _____

Birth Date: _____ Death Date: _____

Date: _____

(Signature)

Please return to: The Compassionate Friends of F-M Area, PO Box 10686, Fargo ND 58106
(Please note that if you have already submitted a permission slip, you do not need to submit another one)

THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS
OF THE F-M AREA
PO BOX 10686
FARGO ND 58106

NON-PROFIT
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT #1625
FARGO, ND

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**The
Compassionate
Friends**
Fargo/Moorhead Area Chapter
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

MISSION STATEMENT: When a child dies, at any age, the family suffers intense pain and may feel hopeless and isolated. The Compassionate Friends provides highly personal comfort, hope, and support to every family experiencing the death of a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, or a grandchild, and helps others better assist the grieving family.

A SINCERE WELCOME TO ALL COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS...We are a nonprofit self-help organization offering friendship and support to families who have experienced the death of a child. We offer group support, understanding and friendship. Our purpose is to promote and aid parents and siblings in the positive resolution of the grief they are experiencing and to foster physical and emotional health. If you have questions or wish to talk directly to a member of the Fargo-Moorhead Compassionate Friends, please call any of the numbers listed.

FARGO-MOORHEAD COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS BOARD

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN THE BOARD AT ANY TIME!

Chapter Leader	Paul & Kara Bailey701-491-0364	Newsletter Editor	Nancy Teeuwen..... 701-730-0805
Co-Chapter Leader	Lori Wiger.....701-781-3931	Newsletter Database	Sheryl Cvijanovich 701-540-3287
Secretary	Sheryl Cvijanovich.....701-540-3287	Website Administrator	Sheryl Cvijanovich 701-540-3287
Treasurer	Chuck Klinkhammer701-298-2929	Initial Contact	Sheryl Cvijanovich
Mailing Committee	Contact Us to Join	Librarian	Contact Us to Volunteer

LIBRARY INFORMATION: We have an extensive library available. Please feel free to check materials at our next meeting.

TELEPHONE FRIENDS

HAVING A BAD DAY OR NIGHT? Feel free to call and talk to any of the following:

- Sheryl Cvijanovich (son, 23 - illness) 701-540-3287
- Lois Gangnes (son, 24 - accident) 701-282-4083
- Nancy Teeuwen (daughter, 15 hours - illness)..... 701-730-0805
- Mark & Hella Helfter (miscarriage, son, 35-accident & son, 45-cancer)... 701-235-9622

Love gifts must be received by the 15th to be included in the next month's newsletter. If you wish to give a love gift please complete:

Love gift given in Memory/Honor of _____

Name _____

Address _____

Relationship _____ Born _____ Died _____

NOTE: By giving a love gift, you are giving us permission to include your child(ren) in our monthly birthdays and anniversaries.