

The Compassionate Friends

Modesto~Riverbank Chapter

Supporting Family After a Child Dies

A self-help organization offering friendship, understanding and hope to bereaved families that have experienced the death of a child.

www.modestoriverbanktcf.org

April 2020

tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com

MONTHLY MEETING

7:00 PM

Bridge Covenant Church

2201 Morrill Road

Riverbank, CA 95367

(Corner of Oakdale Rd and Morrill Rd)

*The monthly
meeting scheduled
for
Monday, April 13
has been cancelled*

Upcoming Meetings

May 11th

June 8th

July 13th



Our Mission

The mission of The Compassionate Friends:

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.

*Your life becomes a
masterpiece
when you learn to
master peace.*

MESSAGE LINE

(209)622-6786

*If you leave a message
a steering committee member
will return your call.*

2020 Steering Committee

Tracey Parker – Chapter Leader

Devon Homme – Secretary

Elsie Freeman – Treasurer

Kris Leitner – Newsletter Editor

Janet Neal – Outreach Coordinator

Lori Leitner – Hospitality & Library

Chad Homme – Public Relations

Mike & Suzanne Casity – Website

Visit us on Facebook
The Modesto-Riverbank
Area Chapter of TCF



Find us on Instagram at
[modestoriverbank_tcf](https://www.instagram.com/modestoriverbank_tcf)



Letter from the Leader

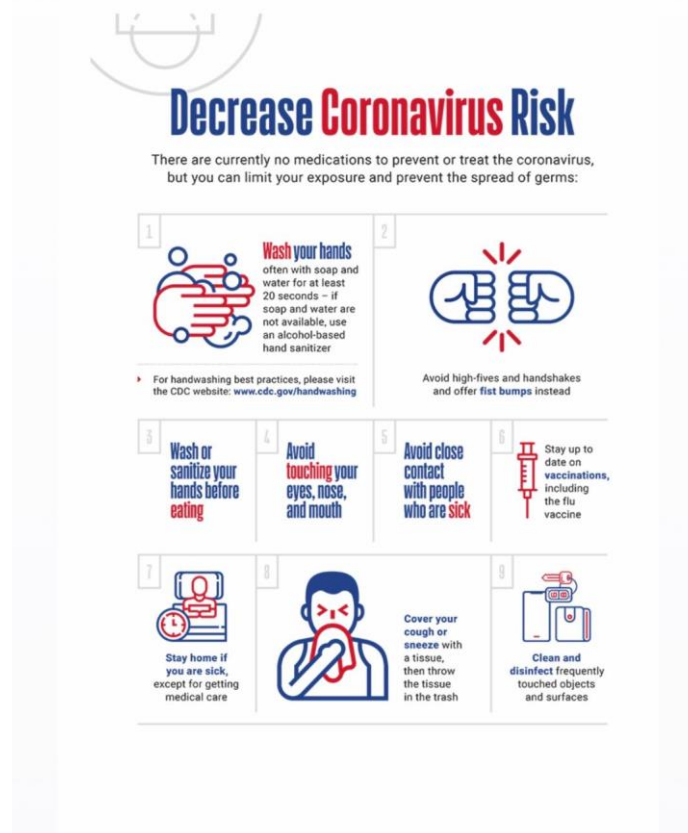
Dear Friends,

I am not sure where to begin.... There is so much happening. First and foremost, I want to express my care and concern for each of you and your families. As Compassionate Friends, we are all connected in a unique and meaningful way. Each of us reached out when the burden of our grief was too big for us to carry alone. In doing so, we have become much like a family. And, as my son James would have said, "If you are my friend, then you are my family." To that end I would like to assure you that myself along with the Steering Committee are taking steps to continue The Compassionate Friends mission to provide comfort, hope, and support.

As you will notice in this newsletter, all our events, including our regular chapter meeting for April, have been canceled. I don't know about you, but for me the shelter-in-place order is extra challenging when coupled with my grief. I do not do well when I am at home for long periods of time. I deliberately schedule my life to be a busy one. Otherwise, my grief tends to get the best of me, and my mental health can spiral downward. With that in mind, our chapter will be implementing strategies to reach out to our members to provide the support that many of us especially need in these difficult times.

Please watch for updates in your email, on our website and on our Facebook page. I would also like to remind you that you may call or text us at 209-622-6787, and one of us will get back to you as soon as possible. In the meantime, I thank you for your understanding and wish each of you gentle days ahead.

~Tracey Parker Chapter Leader & James' Mom





The Compassionate Friends

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Dear Compassionate Friends Family,

The Board of Directors and Leadership Staff are continuing to monitor developments and updated guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). We know this is a challenging time for all of us as personal and public safety are a top priority. Our mission to provide highly personal comfort, hope, and support to bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings remains a priority as well. Though challenging, we can find creative ways to strike a balance.

In this manner, we are encouraging each chapter to adhere to national, state, and local recommendations and laws, and the recommendations of the CDC to prevent the spread of COVID-19. You can find the CDC recommendations here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>. Please monitor news reports for developments in your community and state. The suggested safety measures should be put in place within your local chapter meetings.

It is understandable that many of us will need to cancel meetings through the duration of this situation. Should this be the case with your chapter, we would like to suggest a few alternatives to meeting in person:

Video and Phone Conferencing - In order to provide your chapter members access to support, there are a few technology options to accomplish this. Free Video Conferencing software like Zoom, Skype, or other such services can be effective and offer the opportunity to gather "virtually" for supportive conversations. If video conferencing is not an option, phone conferencing can also be effective. There are a number of free conferencing services online. You can find these by searching for Free Conference Line and follow the instructions. We will be scheduling video call tutorials of these technologies over the next week for those who might want to explore this option.

TCF Online Groups - The Compassionate Friends has many options for Facebook Groups and Online Support Groups. You can refer members to these options by referring them to this link on the TCF website: <https://www.compassionatefriends.org/find-support/online-communities/>

Phone a Friend - Another option would be to organize a phone chain or phone call schedule where members are able to reach out to one another for support when they might need it most. If you cannot meet as a group, members can still reach out to one another via phone.

National Conference - In regard to the National Conference scheduled in July, we continue to monitor this situation as well. We are evaluating all of our options, but, for now, plans continue to move forward. We will have updates as we learn more and as decisions are made.

Again, personal and public safety is a priority as is the need to offer support to those who need us in the current environment. We will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as more information is made known. Please feel free to reach out - we are here to help you navigate this challenging time. We are The Compassionate Friends, and no one needs to walk alone.

Sincerely,

The TCF Board of Directors and Leadership

April

EVENTS

*All events and activities
are cancelled or postponed
until further notice.*



PHONE TREE

If you are struggling and need to talk, we are here for you. We have set up a phone tree and someone is available day or night.

You can call or text us at 209622-6786 and one of the Steering Committee will get back to you as soon as possible. You may also reach someone through the email address, tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com, or on our private Facebook page which you can find by searching for The Modesto-Riverbank Area Chapter Of TCF.

If you would like to be a part of our phone tree and be available for other members please contact us through one of the above mentioned methods and we will add your name and number to our list.

The Grief Fog That Comes With Loss

This wasn't me being absent minded, this was amnesia

How could you forget?" he asks, looking at me incredulously. "Really? Again?"

He's right. How could I forget? But then, these days, I forget a lot of things. "I'm sorry," I say.

His irritation hurts me, as does my own frustration at not remembering the simplest of things. I seem to live in a perpetual cloud of distraction, unmindfulness being the witness to my every act. I believe I'm being attentive because I truly do listen. But come a day, a week, a month later and realize that my mind did not retain the information and I stand, dismayed, before my abstracted state of mind.

Since my boy was killed, I make lists. To-do lists. Must-be-done-by-then lists. Which-bills-to-pay lists. Discarded envelopes lie scattered on my desk as if it's rained unwanted mail. Their every corner is covered in hastily jotted down words so as to remember to book appointments, answer messages, make a call.

When I tell friends I've lost my mind, it's not in jest. I shyly explain its grief fog, a 'thing' you get when you've suffered a loss the magnitude of mine.

Learning To Live With Grief Brain

My doctor diagnosed a lack of sleep. "OK, so tell me something I don't know," I answered.

She smiled wryly. "It's normal," she replied. "It'll get better with time," and handed me a bag filled with bath salts and scented candles.

Grief fog. Funny how those words are meant to explain the fact that our brain cells no longer function how they used to. Lack of concentration? Ah, it's grief fog. Regular lapses in memory? Well, what did I expect following a traumatic loss? Confused, fuzzy thinking? It's that pesky grief fog again!

After Alex was killed, my brain felt scorched. I couldn't think straight. It wasn't until two years into my grief that I realized how affected I was. A good girlfriend showed me a photo of us together. I looked terrible, the ghoul eyes of the newly-bereaved staring out at me.

"Do you remember that day?" she asked.

She had to remind me that she'd stayed at my home for five days. Yes, five days. I had absolutely no recollection of her visit. It was as if it had never happened. This wasn't me being absent minded, this was amnesia.

The implications are multiple, that much is obvious. If you work, manage a family, or are having to deal with lawyers following the death of your loved one, you're not going to be up to the mark. Unfortunately, few understand just how bad it can get.

You may look as if you're taking it all in, and you probably are, on some level — but the minute you turn away your trauma may wipe your memory clean. For me, it's a lottery what I actually get to remember.

Stress is the biggie here. Grief causes enormous stress which in turn floods our body with cortisol. Research shows that the same parts of the brain are affected by emotional loss as by physical pain. It's known that emotional traumatic brain 'injury' following the death of a child or loved one will most often lead to serious changes in brain function.

People talk of grief brain, which manifests in a multitude of ways, grief fog being one of the many symptoms the bereaved have to contend with. Other indicators of grief brain can include disturbed sleep, fatigue, anxiety, and loss of appetite, and often, following a traumatic loss, PTSD.

Secondary Losses – How Long Is Your List?

It's five years since Alex died. I'd love to report that I can now will my intellect back whenever I want – but I can't. I've had to slowly learn what works for me, and what to avoid. I've done it the hard way by feeling exasperated with myself and annoying quite a few others.

When I'm rested I do see a difference in my ability to focus but I'm hopeless at establishing a good sleep routine, so it's a work in progress. I also eat home-cooked meals and limit my alcohol intake.

I'm getting better at saying 'no' to people when I feel overwhelmed as this lowers stress levels. I'm learning to schedule my social life so it happens in small, gentle doses.

My ability to multitask is coming back, but it's still a dangerous series of stepping stones that can slip me up when I'm not concentrating and feeling calm. Exercise helps, as does finding time for relaxation.

I'm not re-inventing the wheel here. By adopting a sensible, self-care approach, I can mitigate the effects of brain fog. I've learned to gift myself the space for downtime and I've lowered my expectations where my memory is concerned.

As the years have grated past, I've gradually increased my ability to retain information.

Yet to this day, grief fog remains one of the secondary losses that has come with the death of my son. I've had to accept that my memory repeatedly fails me, and probably always will.

By: Katja Faber
stillstandingmag.com

Helping a Grandparent Who Is Grieving

By: Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.
www.centerforloss.com

“When a grandchild dies, grandparents grieve twice. They mourn the loss of the child and they feel the pain of their own child’s suffering. Sometimes we forget about the grandparents when a child dies. You can help by not forgetting, by offering the grandparents your love, support and presence in the weeks and months to come.”

A child or young adult has died. Everyone who loved the child is now faced with mourning this tragic, untimely death. The child’s parents are heartbroken. But what about the grandparents? How might they be feeling? How can you help them with their unique grief? This article will guide you in ways to turn your concern for the grandparents into positive action.

Realize that a grandparent’s grief is unique

When a grandchild dies, the grandparent often mourns the death on many levels. The grandparent probably loved the child dearly and may have been very close to him or her. The death has created a hole in the grandparent’s life that cannot be filled by anyone else. Grandparents who were not close to the child who died, perhaps because they lived far away, may instead mourn the loss of a relationship they never had.

Grieving grandparents are also faced with witnessing their child—the parent of the child who died—mourn the death. A parent’s love for a child is perhaps the strongest of all human bonds. For the parents of the child who died, the pain of grief may seem intolerable. For the grandparents, watching their own child suffer so and feeling powerless to take away the hurt can feel almost as intolerable.

Acknowledge the grandparent’s search for meaning

When someone loved dies, we all ponder the meaning of life and death. When a child or young adult dies, this search for meaning can be especially painful. Young people aren’t supposed to die. The death violates the natural order of life and seems terribly unfair.

For grandparents, who may have lived long, rich lives already, the struggle to understand the death may bring about feelings of guilt. “Why didn’t God take me, instead?” the grandparent may ask himself. “Why couldn’t it have been me?” Such feelings are both normal and necessary. You can help by encouraging the grandparent to talk about them.

Respect faith and spirituality

Many people develop strong commitments to faith and spirituality as they get older. If you allow them, grieving grandparents will “teach you” about the role of faith and spirituality in their lives. Encourage them to express their faith if doing so helps them heal in grief.

Sometimes, however, faith can naturally complicate healing. The grandparent may feel angry at God for “taking” the grandchild. He then may feel guilty about his anger, because, he may reason, God is not to be questioned. Or the grandparent may struggle with feelings of doubt about God’s plan or the afterlife. Talking with a pastor may help the grandparent, as long as the pastor allows the grandparent to honestly express her feelings of anger, guilt and sadness.

No one should tell a grandparent that she shouldn’t grieve because the child has gone to heaven; mourning and having faith are not mutually exclusive.

Listen with your heart

You can begin to help by simply listening. Your physical presence and desire to listen without judging are critical helping tools. Don't worry so much about what you will say. Just concentrate on the words that are being shared with you. The grieving grandparent may want to share the same story about the death over and over again. It's as if talking about the death makes it a little more bearable each time. Listen attentively. Realize that this repetition is part of the grandparent's healing process. Simply listen and try to understand.

Sometimes grandparents, especially grandfathers, don't want to talk about the death. They may have been raised to believe that talking about feelings is frivolous or selfish or unmanly. It's OK; they don't have to talk. Simply spending time with them demonstrates your love and concern.

Be compassionate

Give the grandparent permission to express her feelings without fear of criticism. Learn from the grandparent; don't instruct or set expectations about she should respond. Never say, "I know just how you feel." You don't. Think about your helper role as someone who "walks with" not "behind" or "in front of" the grieving grandparent.

Allow the grandparent to experience all the hurt, sorrow and pain that he is feeling at the time. Enter into his feelings, but never try to take them away. And recognize that tears are a natural and appropriate expression of the pain associated with the death.

Avoid clichés

Words, particularly clichés, can be extremely painful for a grieving grandparent. Clichés are trite comments often intended to provide simple solutions to difficult realities. Grandparents are often told, "God needed another angel in heaven" or "Don't worry, John and Susie (can) have another child" or "You have to be strong for your child." Comments like these are not constructive. Instead, they hurt because they diminish the very real and very painful loss of a unique child.

Offer practical help

Preparing food, washing clothes, and cleaning the house are just a few of the practical ways of showing you care. And, just as with your presence, this support is needed at the time of the death as well as in the weeks and months ahead.

Write a personal note

Sympathy cards express your concern, but there is no substitute for your personal written words. What do you say? Share a favorite memory of the child who died. Relate the special qualities that you valued in him or her. These words will be a loving gift to the grandparent, words that will be reread and remembered always. Use the name of the child who died in your personal note and in talking to the grandparent. Hearing that name can be comforting, and it confirms that you have not forgotten this important child whom the grandparent loved and misses so much.

Be aware of holidays and other significant days

The grandparent may have a difficult time during special occasions like holidays and other significant days, such as the child's birthday and the anniversary of the child's death. These events emphasize the child's absence. Respect this pain as a natural extension of the grief process.

These are appropriate times to visit the grandparents or write a note or simply give them a quick phone call. Your ongoing support will be appreciated and healing.

Support our chapter by using Amazon Smile

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What is AmazonSmile?

AmazonSmile is a simple way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added benefit that Amazon will donate 0.5% of your eligible purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. You can choose from over one million organizations to support. (click on the link above for further information).

LOVE GIFTS

Love gifts can be made in memory of your child, sibling or grandchild in any amount. Donations received are used for our annual Candle Lighting Program each December, for sending our monthly newsletter via US mail and for community outreach. We are here to reach out to other bereaved families who may not be aware we are here to lend our support after the death of a child. Please send your tax-deductible donation to the PO Box below.

In loving memory of ALL our beloved children

If you wish to make a Love Gift donation, please fill out the information below and send with a check to:

The Compassionate Friends
Modesto/Riverbank Area Chapter
PO Box 578713
Modesto, CA 95357

☐ Child, ☐ Sibling or ☐ Grandchild _____

Date of Birth_____/_____/_____ Date of Passing_____/_____/_____

Donation amount_____

Your Name_____

Telephone_____ Your email address_____

Your address_____ City_____ Zip_____

Would you like your gift listed in our monthly newsletter in memory of your child, grandchild or sibling?

The amount will remain anonymous Yes ___ No ___

The Compassionate Friends is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. Donations are tax deductible



Thank you 7- Eleven stores at
2500 Geer Rd., Turlock, CA and
3225 McHenry Ave., Modesto, CA
for sponsoring our monthly
newsletter!!

**Check out our closed Facebook page,
Modesto-Riverbank Area Chapter of
TCF. Make a request to join the page &
an Administrator will approve your
request.**

**Join us on our Instagram
account page. You can find us at -
*modestoriverbankarea_tcf.***

*Our Steering Committee wants to
provide the best possible support to
each of our TCF Chapter members and
friends. Please contact a member of the
Steering Committee with any concerns
you have or any ideas about how our
Chapter can be of support to you and
others. We're also available if you'd
like to talk about your child or some
aspect of the challenges of your
bereavement journey. You can reach
us by email at:
tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com or by
phone at 209-622-6786 or on Facebook.*



Visit our website for
information and to
stay up to date on
chapter events.

www.modestoriverbanktcf.org



You can still get photo button made of your child,
grandchild or sibling with our new button machine!
Buttons can be made at 6:30 pm on our meeting
nights. Bring an extra copy of a photo or a
photocopy of it that can be cut into a circle 3" in
diameter. Close-up photos usually work the best.
You may bring a graphic design instead of a photo,
if you wish. This will be a wonderful way to get
acquainted with each other's children! Magnets are
also available!!



Please remember to send in your child's
photo so that it can be added to the new
TCF Modesto-Riverbank website.
Send photos to: scasity@comcast.net