

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

March 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)

*Please join us at our
next meeting on
Monday, March 9th*

**Please arrive by 6:50 p.m. so we
may begin promptly at 7:00 p.m. **

Upcoming Meetings

April 13th

May 11th

June 8th

You're braver
than you
believe, and
stronger than
you seem, and
smarter than
you think.

A.A. Milne



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.

Joy does not simply happen to us.

We have to choose joy

and keep choosing it every day.

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





How Joy and Grief Can Coexist After Losing a Child

I don't believe you "get over" the death of your child. I don't believe you ever "move on" from losses of this magnitude. Those seismic shifts...The unexpected, life-altering twists we didn't plan...Those stay with us. Shape us. Shape how we perceive the world. That doesn't mean life no longer contains joy. The truth is joy and sorrow can coexist. And we can have a meaningful, contented, even "happy" existence while holding both. But we must learn to carry grief, accept that we must, and lead with love.

Grief is big, but love is bigger.

When my daughter, Gwendolyn, was alive this was easy. She was literally the joy I could hold and so on those tough days when my world was spinning out of control, I only had to look at her, follow her remarkable ability to bounce back, or snuggle into her as she slept. After many scares because of spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), I literally held her sweet-smelling sweaty hand to my lips and let the tears stain my cheeks as she rested. Joy and sorrow in one space. After Gwendolyn died, with the roaring of death and the anchor of my joy no longer tangible, I grasped for ways to hold both more easily. Our life together let me know I would again, and that was a comfort, but I had to now learn how to carry this entirely new and monstrously big weight of child loss.

Somewhere along the way of processing the death of my child, her debilitating and life-limiting diagnosis, the traumas, the helplessness and losses upon losses that came with all of that, I created in my mind a visual to help me feel less overwhelmed or hung up on the unfairness. I wasn't conscious of it, and it may seem silly, but this mental picture continues to help me focus when spiraling, as grief often does.

I imagine my grief all piled into a backpack. Mine is filled with loss and pain and trauma and all that circles around grief. Every day I feel its straps on my shoulders and the girth on my back. I don't like it, it certainly isn't fashionable, but I still have to carry it – no matter where I go, no matter who I'm with. I don't get to put it down when there's a holiday or I go on vacation. Maybe someday I will, I don't know. But for now it comes with me always and I must be the one to carry it. Others can help, but no one can do it for me.

Some days it is dense and feels like lead and I taste the sweat and dust as I heave it along. I curse at the weight and grow weary from the heaviness. On those days I need to rest more. On other days, it's lighter and I hardly notice it's there. And, though I must still carry it, the warmth of it on my skin feels familiar and it moves with me through belly laughs. Some days it can even help propel me forward.

Along the way, I've picked up new tools that have allowed me to set down some of the weight I no longer need, that I have now absorbed. And the one truth that continues to lighten the load is the weight of grief is nowhere near as big as love.

I have learned to accept what I must carry. I can't change it entirely. It just is. But it's mine and it's wrapped with courage and grit and kindness and empathy and strength and the most beautiful big love in the world. And it's mine to choose how to grow with it, how to build upon it. Acceptance allows me to carry the pain that exists without judgment – and allows me to laugh and make new memories without judging that either. Acceptance limits the pressure of an expected timeline of healing because grief is never finite, nor neatly packaged in stages we can methodically check off as completed. Acceptance reminds me to give myself grace in the confusion of an expected future taken, a life together no longer. And acceptance has allowed me to let go of resentment and anger.

It takes enormous work to sort through grief and the pain when life doesn't go as planned. And it also takes enormous courage to try. To keep trying when it hurts like hell and feels so dark and lonely. To unearth all the unfairness, the utter helplessness, the anger, and wrestle with all that those big feelings contain. And to do so over and over again as grief ebbs and flows and new triggers bring new facets to process. It's much easier to choose to be resentful for the rest of your life. But resentment, while justified, will never lift us. Resentment will only press our faces down into the mud, making it harder and harder to see anything good... to recognize the gifts of each day... to breathe.

While it may not feel like a choice because what has happened or is happening to us, to our child, to our family... is out of our control, we each get to choose how we carry our grief. Every day we get to choose a new way. What I know for sure is the love we carry in life, we continue to carry in death. For so long I didn't know where to put that love because I used to devour it into Gwendolyn. Without her, I felt so upside down. But I promise you, your love will find a home. The love we carry will find its way in how we love others, in how we treat people, in the good we put into the world. It will surface in a deeper empathy for pain, in a stronger sense of gratitude, in the way we experience the world.

Grief is big, but love is bigger.

So how are you going to carry what you must?

<https://themighty.com>

March Events

Lunch with the Ladies

Date: Sunday, March 22nd 2020

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Location: Frank's Downtown Café

162 N. Maple Ave., Manteca, CA 95336

To RSVP - call or text Tracey at 209-996-2040 or email tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com.

Breakfast with the Dads

*Save the dates Saturday, March 7th and Saturday, April 4th
for breakfast with other bereaved dads in our chapter.*

8 a.m. at Perko's in Salida - 4642 Kiernan Avenue

Confirm with Chad at 209-338-8496 or

chomme@gmail.com, or Norm at 209-345-0601 or

nandrews6863@charter.net, & they'll save a seat for you.



Suicide Loss Support Group

*7 pm at the Sutter Health Education Center
in the back of McHenry Village Suite B*

The group meets the third Monday of each month.

*For more information, contact Norm at
(209) 345-0601 or at nandrews6863@charter.net*

SMASH SACRAMENTO ~ CHAPTER EVENT

WHEN: SATURDAY, MARCH 14TH 2020

TIME: 11:00A.M. (SUBJECT TO CHANGE BASED ON FACILITY OPENINGS)

WHERE: 5839 MANZANITA AVE STE#11, CARMICHAEL, CA 95608

COST: \$20 PER PERSON

RSVP: BY TEXT OR CALL TO TRACEY (209)996-2040

BY WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11TH 2020

www.smashsacramento.com



5th Tuesday Dinner

March 31st 2020

6:00 p.m.

BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse

3401 Dale Rd., Modesto, CA 95356

When someone dies,
you don't get over your grief by **FORGETTING**,

you get through your grief by *remembering.*

~ author unknown



**The
Compassionate
Friends**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



Our Experience of Grief is Unique as a Fingerprint

For the dead and the living, we must bear witness. ~ *Elie Wiesel*

Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed. That doesn't mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss without trying to point out the silver lining.

This need is hardwired in us, since our emotions bind us to one another, and in those bonds is the key to our survival. From the moment we're born, we realize we're not alone. Our brains are equipped with mirroring neurons, which is why when the mother smiles, the baby smiles back. This continues into adulthood. I remember walking down the street one day and a man said to me, "Howdy." I'm not usually someone who says "Howdy." But I instinctively said back to him, "Howdy!" This is more than copying each other's expressions. It's also about the emotions underlying the expressions. The mirroring neurons enable mother and child to pick up on each other's emotions.

Dr. Edward Tronick is part of a psychology team that made a short video that shows what happens if babies do not feel their emotions reflected and acknowledged by those around them. First we see a ten-month-old sitting in a high chair, eyes wide and happily fixed on his mother's smiling face. The baby and mother mirror each other as I described above. One laughs, then the other laughs; the baby points and the mother looks in the direction in which he's pointing. But then at the direction of the researchers, the mother turns away, and when she turns back to the baby, she has a blank look on her face. The confused baby does everything to try to get a reaction out of her. He cries and screams in distress. This is an innate reaction, because children know on a subconscious level that they need others for survival. If their survival is dependent on someone who is unable to be truly present for them, they suffer.

The same is true for adults. If they are grieving, they need to feel their grief acknowledged and reflected by others. But in our hyper-busy world, grief has been minimized and sanitized. You get three days off work after a loved one dies and then everyone expects you to carry on like nothing happened. There are fewer and fewer opportunities for those around you to bear witness to your pain, and this can be very isolating.

I was touring in Australia when I met a researcher who told me about the work she was doing to study the way of life in the northern indigenous villages of Australia. One of the villagers told her that the night someone dies, everyone in the village moves a piece of furniture or something else into their yard. The next day, when the bereaved family wakes up and looks outside, they see that *everything has changed* since their loved one died—not just for them but for everyone. That's how these communities' witness, and mirror, grief. They are showing in a tangible way that someone's death matters. The loss is made visible.

In this country, too, it was once common for us to come together as a community to bear witness to the grief experienced when a loved one died. But in our current culture, the mourner is made to feel that though his or her own world has been shattered, everyone else's world goes on as if *nothing* has changed. There are too few rituals to commemorate mourning, and too little time allotted to it.

Grief should unite us. It is a universal experience. If I'm talking to someone with a physical ailment, I can listen and empathize, but I may never have that particular problem. When I'm with someone whose loved one died, however, I know I'll be in their shoes someday and I try to understand what they are feeling. Not to change it—just to acknowledge it fully. I feel privileged when someone shares their pain and grief with me. The act of witnessing someone's vulnerability can bring the person out of isolation if the witnessing is done without judgment.

Too often outsiders who may have the best of intentions will suggest to a bereaved person that it's time to move on, embrace life, and let go of grief. But grief should be a no-judgment zone. Those who understand what you're going through will never judge you or think your grief is out of proportion or too prolonged. Grief is what's going on inside of us, while mourning is what we do on the outside. The internal work of grief is a process, a journey. It does not have prescribed dimensions and it does not end on a certain date.

When people ask me how long they're going to grieve, I ask them, "How long will your loved one be dead? That's how long. I don't mean you'll be in pain forever. But you will never forget that person, never be able to fill the unique hole that has been left in your heart. There is what I call the one-year myth—we should be done and complete with all grieving in one year. Not remotely true. In the first year of your loss, you're likely to mourn and grieve intensely. After that, your grief will probably fluctuate. It will seem to lessen, then something will trigger it, and you'll find yourself back in the full pain of loss. In time it will hurt less often and with less intensity. But it will always be there."

That's about as specific as I can get in answering the question. As vague as it is, it still doesn't cover all the possibilities. Over many years of grief work, I've come to realize that if I've seen *one* person in grief, I've only seen that *one* person in grief. I can't compare one griever to another, even if they're in the same family. One sister cries a lot and the other one doesn't. One son is vulnerable and raw. The other just wants to move on. Some people are expressive. Others shy away from their feelings. Some have more feelings. Some have less. Some are more productive and practical in their grieving style. They have a "buckle down and move on" mentality. We can mistakenly think that people who show no visible signs of pain should be in a grief group, getting in touch with and sharing their feelings. But if that is not their style in life, it won't be in grief, either. They must experience loss in their own way. Suggesting otherwise will not be helpful to them.

In our modern world, our grief is often witnessed online. When I post quotes about grief on social media, I notice different kinds of responses. If I post hopeful, optimistic quotes about healing, they give hope to many people, but don't resonate with others. Those who are in a dark place aren't ready to hear about hope, often because they're at the beginning of the grieving process and their grief is too acute to allow for any other emotions. They just want the darkness of their grief to be seen and acknowledged. Their tears are evidence of their love, proof that the person who died was someone who mattered deeply. If I post something like, "Today it feels like the pain will

never end,” or “Grief feels like a dark cloud that encompasses the whole sky,” that will resonate with them. It mirrors and validates their feelings, which can be far more consoling than trying to find something positive in the situation.

Some grieve with darkness, some with light, some with both, depending on where they are in the cycle of grief. It would be a mistake to conclude that one is better than the other or that there’s a right way to grieve. There are just different ways to grieve, different feelings evoked by loss. This is also true of our relationship to hope. Hope can be like oxygen to people in grief. For others, however, especially in the early stages, it can feel invalidating. “In my sorrow, how dare you want me to feel hopeful . . . about what? Do you need me to hope to make *you* feel more comfortable?”

Hope has a very close relationship with meaning. In the same way our meaning changes, so does hope. Sometimes when I work with someone stuck in grief, I will say, “It sounds like hope died with your loved one. It seems all is lost.”

Surprisingly they perk up. “Yes, that’s it.”

They feel witnessed. I often say, “A loved one’s death is permanent, and that is so heartbreaking. But I believe your loss of hope can be temporary. Until you can find it, I’ll hold it for you. I have hope for you. I don’t want to invalidate your feelings as they are, but I also don’t want to give death any more power than it already has. Death ends a life, but not our relationship, our love, or our hope.”

Sometimes I meet someone in grief who tells me that a family member or friend said something terrible—which often turns out to be some variation of “time heals all” or “be happy your loved one is at peace now.” Such statements can make the bereaved think that their feelings have not been witnessed. Most of us want to say something helpful, but we may not realize that our timing and delivery are off. If the griever needs to remain in a dark place for a while, then trying to offer some kind of cheer will be very hurtful. We must really *see* the person we are trying to comfort. Loss can become more meaningful—and more bearable—when reflected, and reflected accurately, in another’s eyes.

We also have to remember that our own thoughts about the one who died are irrelevant. Maybe we think our friend’s mother was so awful that she wasn’t worth grieving over. Or we know that our sister’s husband had been unfaithful and wonder why she is nonetheless sobbing over his death. What we think has nothing at all to do with the feelings of those who are in grief, and they will not be comforted by hearing us criticize their loved ones as not being deserving of their sorrow.

People who mourn the loss of their pets often comment on how little people understand about their grief. In the months that followed the death of my son, one of my dear friends experienced his own loss. His beloved dog died at the age of 16. When I reached out to him to express my condolences, he was taken aback by my concern. “Your loss is so much worse than mine,” he said. I couldn’t see his tears and think that his loss was any less painful or meaningful than mine. Every loss has meaning, and all losses are to be grieved—and witnessed. I have a rule on pet loss. “If the love is real, the grief is real.” The grief that comes with loss is how we experience the depths of our love, and love takes many forms in this life.

<https://lithub.com>

UPCOMING



Date: Saturday, May 09, 2020
Registration: 8:00AM | **Start:** 9:00 AM
Beyer Community Park
3700 Beyer Park Drive
Modesto, CA 95355
www.marchforbabies.org



Plans are underway for our first ever **Walk to Remember**. We have applied for the permits to walk around Beyer Park in Modesto. The event will be on Saturday, May 16th 2020 starting at 9:00 a.m. If you would like to volunteer to help, please contact Tracey by phone or text at (209) 996-2040.

Pool Party & BBQ at the Casity's

Saturday, June 27th 2020

1567 Parkview St., Manteca, CA 95337

(more information to follow)

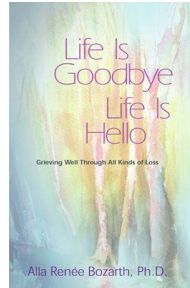


Click on photo for more information

43rd TCF National Conference
July 24-26, 2020 • Atlanta, GA

Book of the Month

This month's spotlight book is:



Please take full advantage of our chapter library. We have a nice selection of books to choose from. The library is available before and after the monthly meeting.

~ 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 of 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.

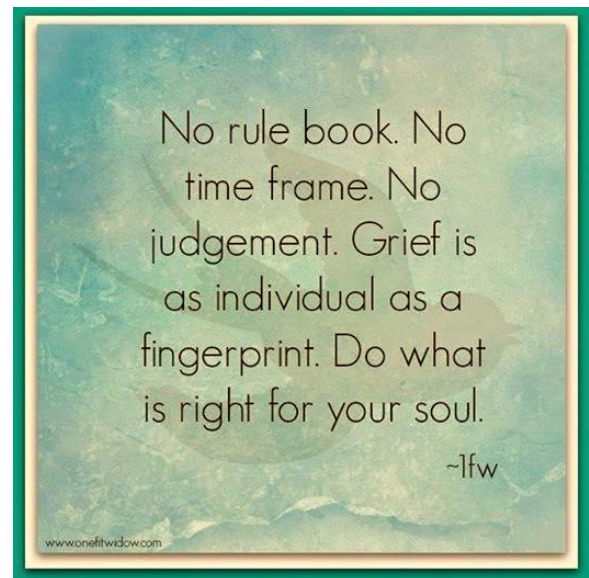


visit our website for
information and to
stay up to date on
chapter events.

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