

# The Compassionate Friends

## The Modesto Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

### 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](http://www.modestoriverbanktcf.org)

November 2021

[tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto: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, November 8<sup>th</sup>**

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

#### Upcoming Meetings

December 13<sup>th</sup>

January 10<sup>th</sup>

February 14<sup>th</sup>



Are you taking a vacation? Visiting family? Moving? Helping someone new to TCF to find a chapter?

Use the link below to find TCF chapters in other cities and states

[Chapter Meeting Locator - Compassionate Friends](#)



### 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.

I give you this, one thought to keep.

I am with you still, I do not sleep.

I am a thousand winds that blow.

I am the diamond glints on the snow.

I am the sunlight on the ripened grain.

I am the gentle autumn rain.

When you awaken in the morning's hush,

I am the swift uplifting rush...

of quiet birds in circled flight.

I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not think of me as gone -

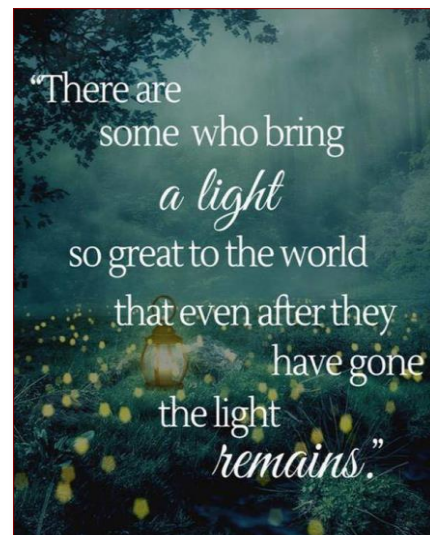
I am with you still, in each new dawn.

NATIVE AMERICAN PRAYER

#### MESSAGE LINE

(209)622-6786

Please leave a message and  
a steering committee  
member will return your  
call.



#### 2021 Steering Committee

**Tracey Parker**

Chapter Leader

**Devon Homme**

Secretary

**Elsie Freeman**

Treasurer

**Janet Neal**

Outreach Coordinator

**Lori Leitner**

Hospitality & Library

**Chad Homme**

Public Relations

**Kris Leitner**

Newsletter Editor

**Mike & Suzanne Casity**

Website



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Monthly Meeting

Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Please join us for an online meeting.

[November Zoom Chapter Meeting](#)



## Sunday Conversations

Sunday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at 3:00 p.m.

A chance for us to just chat!!

[November Sunday Conversations Zoom Meeting](#)



### Offering Help After A Suicide Death

[Friends for Survival Inc. - Suicide Bereavement, Bereavement Support](#)

*The group meets, by Zoom, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m.*

*Pre-registration is required @ [Meetings \(friendsforsurvival.org\)](#)*

## December Slide Show

*Our chapter has participated in the annual TCF World Wide Candle Lighting in December every year since 2009. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, we will not be hosting a live event this year. This is an event we always look forward to, and we apologize that it has to be cancelled.*

*We would like to honor all our beloved children, siblings and grandchildren this December by presenting a slide show, similar to what we have done the last three years at the annual event. If you would like to have a photo of your loved one included in the slide show, please email it to us at: [tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com). If we already have a photo of your loved one on file, you needn't resend; just email us if you would like to use a different photo. All photos need to be received by November 30<sup>th</sup>. We will be sharing the slide show at the monthly zoom meeting and for those who are unable to attend the meeting we will provide other viewing options. We encourage you to have a candle ready to light for your loved one as you watch the slide show.*



# An Open Letter To Parents Who Have Lost A Child

*Healing is not on a timetable*



I heard someone say, grief isn't a life sentence, it's a life passage. It's the one common human experience we all have at one time or another. But, we didn't expect it to be the death of a child, did we? If you're reading this, it's likely you've lost a child or been affected by the loss of a child. You're now discovering grieving this loss is the hardest thing you've ever done.

I know, because suddenly, without warning, my life changed. My beautiful 16-year old son came home from school complaining of a headache and a fever. The doctor diagnosed him with the flu. But it wasn't. Sometime during the night, my boy was taken from me forever. I found him the next morning in his bed, lifeless. The misdiagnosis was actually a swift and deadly form of bacterial meningitis.

Have you ever felt such incredible emotion as losing your child? It's feared by all parents and an unimaginable loss. Unimaginable, until it happens to you. People refer to it as "the worst that can happen," and that's exactly what it feels like.

***"In the years following my son's death, I discovered, no matter how great my loss, or how deep my grief, the world does not stop."***

In the years following my son's death, I discovered, no matter how great my loss, or how deep my grief, the world does not stop. In fact, it intensifies. I remember thinking... how can I ever be happy again? I felt as though my pain was visible to others, and I would forever be wearing grief as a mask and a tagline..."I'm Sandy Peckinpah and I've lost a child."

Then a friend gave me a journal and said, "Write. Just write." The first blank page was so difficult. I could only put down one sentence, "My son died and my life will never be the same." The next day, I wrote a paragraph, and each day after that I found words came more easily. My journal became my safe haven to empty the well of my sorrow, pouring tears of ink onto paper. And for a little while, I could let my emotions rest.

I *had* to survive this. I had three living children who needed a whole mother. I was not willing to sacrifice my role in their lives by succumbing to paralyzing grief. I kept writing. Words pulled me and pushed me. As weeks went on, I'd read back over the journal entries. I began to see something remarkable... I'd survived another day, another week, another month; and I was growing stronger. I'd see words of hope illuminating my way.

There's no magic secret to the journal. Just pick up a pen and begin with one word or sentence. Keep writing. Healing is not on a timetable. In fact, time doesn't fix this kind of loss. Healing comes from actively pursuing life again. After a while, you'll look back on your words and not recognize the person you once were. You'll see how strong you really are.

***"Healing is not on a timetable. In fact, time doesn't fix this kind of loss."***

I used to believe the cliché "everything happens for a reason," but with this kind of tragedy, it seems to be reversed. When a tragedy like this happens, it can be the starting place to give it reason and relevance. When you recognize this, it's the moment your grieving will shift.

Imagine that. What would it feel like? I used to fantasize and picture my life without the pain by writing out that very question, *What would it be like to feel peace around Garrett's death?* I would visualize myself without the veil of sorrow and allow the comfort of happiness to flow in. And for a brief moment, I *could* feel it. As time went on, I was able to reach that peaceful feeling more frequently. I had the power within the pages of my journal to compartmentalize my sorrow. Once you're aware of what it feels like, you'll be able to access it more easily.

It's been decades since my beautiful son left this earth and sometimes tears still surprise me. But the work of healing has brought me a harmonious blend of resolution and comfort as my heart joyfully connects with the sweet ballad of his memories. Healing doesn't mean you'll never feel the sadness. It means you'll be able to have memories without attaching intense despair.

## ***“My child’s loss taught me to love harder and appreciate every single day.”***

Use your journal as your safe place, and you’ll begin to form a new relationship with your child, telling stories, and feeling the joy you once had when they were alive. I now look at the life of my son and marvel at his 16 years, 3 months, and 10 days. He was the first to call me *mom*. His death was the birth of my new life... learning how to live with his loss, and recognizing who I am because of it. I chose resilience and my journal was a big part of helping me rise up.

My child’s loss taught me to love harder and appreciate every single day. It taught me to reach out to others and begin sharing my story in hopes it could reassure other wounded parents there is life after loss.

As the years go by, I’ve learned a mother’s love never diminishes; in fact, my love for my son has grown, just as it would have if he was still alive. I am still his mother. No child dies without a legacy and a purpose for those that are left behind. It’s up to you, his mother, his father. Honor your child by healing. They wouldn’t want it any other way.

[An Open Letter To Parents Who Have Lost A Child | HuffPost Life](#)

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## ***When GRIEF and THANKSGIVING Collide, Who Will Win?***

Grief is about to meet Thanksgiving. Which one will win? Holidays surface our losses. We’re assaulted by memories. Good times. Not so good times. But most of all, we wish for more time - with those who are no longer here. How do we handle this?

### **First, know that it's okay to hurt.**

Loss hits the heart, hard. We’re crushed, perhaps shattered. Perhaps we’ve never known a Thanksgiving without them. It hurts. How could it not? Give yourself permission to hurt. Your emotions might be all over the place. You might consider downgrading your expectations of yourself, and of others as well. Grief takes a phenomenal amount of energy. This Thanksgiving is going to be different. Breathe deeply. Be as nice to yourself as you can.

### **Second, speak their name, often.**

Many are hesitant to mention their loved one for fear of setting off a chain reaction of grief. Who wants to be the wet blanket, the bringer of doom-and-gloom? But the grief is already there. It’s inside us, waiting to be released. Holding it in doesn’t work. Pretending everything is normal is, well, a lie. Your loved one is the proverbial elephant in the room. If you don’t include them in the holiday, they will burst forth into it anyway. Go ahead. Speak their name. Often. Share the memories and stories. Honor them, and do yourself and everyone else a favor.

### **Third, make a plan.**

Be proactive. Take matters into your own hands. Make a plan to honor your loved one(s) this Thanksgiving. What about...

- *An empty chair at the table?*
- *A time of sharing memories?*
- *A signature/message board with a pic of your loved one in the middle (everyone signs and writes a short message during the holiday)?*
- *Having everyone bring a card or short note written to the loved one, then read them at a set time during the holiday?*



Be creative. Do what makes the most sense to you. Whatever you decide, I recommend you do something proactive at the front end of your holiday. Everyone is well aware of who's missing, so you might as well escort the elephant out into the open quickly. Confront the dread. Make a simple plan. You're honoring your loved one and giving everyone a chance to grieve in a healthy way. Yes, this hurts. That's okay. Speak his or her name often. Make a plan to honor them. Your heart will thank you later. And yes, Christmas is coming too, and you're wondering how in the world you'll get through that. Pause. Breathe deeply again. One holiday at a time. One day at a time. One moment at a time. You are not alone. You are not crazy. You will get through this.

[When GRIEF and THANKSGIVING Collide, Who Will Win? | The Grief Toolbox](#)



# Remembering a Child Lost to Stillbirth or Miscarriage

## *IDEAS FOR HONORING THE CHILDREN WE NEVER MET*



When you lose a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth, or shortly after birth, the grief is very real and visceral. Yet because there is no typical way to commemorate these babies and no socially accepted way to grieve, parents can feel confused and isolated in their sorrow. I know I did.

I was driven by a strong desire to do something for the children I lost. After one miscarriage, I hysterically planted a large garden in one day – moving rocks and planting seeds that were guaranteed to grow. "There are as many ways to commemorate and remember as there are losses," says Christiane Manzella, PhD, senior psychologist at Seleni who specializes in grief counseling. Finding your own way to memorialize a pregnancy loss or stillbirth can bring some measure of eventual comfort. Some of the options below are more appropriate for stillbirths, and some may feel right for miscarriages. But each can be a starting point to help families find what fits best for them.

***Photographs:*** The nonprofit organization, [Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep](#), will send photographers free of charge to capture the time that parents have with a stillborn child or baby that has died shortly after birth.

"I am so grateful for Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," says Sarah Muthler, a Texas mother who lost her daughter Genevieve to stillbirth and was afraid of seeing her after the delivery. "I feared that there would be some obvious physical problem with her, something frightening to see, but the nurses suggested that we have photos taken because this would be our only chance. And they are lovely."

On days when Muthler finds herself disbelieving the fact that she had a daughter who died, she says, "The photos make Genevieve real to me."

Some families choose to make a video or slideshow of their baby's photos. Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep offers tips for capturing these moments on your own (including eight [suggested poses](#)) and will help edit your photos.

***Sending announcements:*** California mom Nora Nicholson sent out announcements for her son, Bryce, who was stillborn at 36 weeks. "My husband and I sent a card to announce my son's death. Because I was so close to my due date we wanted to spread the news of his death without having to reach out to everyone directly," says Nicholson. "We used the quote 'In an instant you touched our hearts' and the footprint that they took at the hospital."

Unfortunately, most vendors have very few (if any) options for parents who have lost a child, and having to browse through traditional birth announcements can be upsetting. Grieving parents may have better luck searching a website such as Etsy.

***Tattoos:*** After Riley Giles, 33, from Brentwood, California, lost his premature twins shortly after birth, he and his wife decided against naming the babies or holding a memorial service. Giles wanted a private way to remember his sons, so he chose to get a tattoo of their footprints. "I'll catch [sight of] it as I'm walking by the mirror, and I'll stop and stare for a little bit," says Giles. "This is my way of keeping my family with me."

***Jewelry:*** "I have a 'mommy ring,'" says Tara Westfall, a California mother who lost two pregnancies to miscarriage. "It's a white gold band with four diamonds representing each of our children." The ring has become a meaningful conversation piece with her two living children as well.

Julia Keevey, 42, of Orinda, California, chose symbolic jewelry to commemorate her daughter Eleanor Hope, lost to stillbirth at 32 weeks. "I wear a butterfly necklace that reminds me of her," she says. "It's something I can touch when I think of her."

Just as with birth announcements, Etsy and eBay have many varieties of miscarriage and stillbirth-related jewelry – everything from traditional angel wings to more contemporary designs.

***Engraved markers:*** Families can publicly or privately memorialize a child with an engraved brick or plaque. As Julia Keevey found, having something you can physically touch is a common desire for grieving parents.

The nonprofit organization [Be Like Brit](#), founded by grieving parents, Len and Cherylann Gengel, offers parents the chance to buy a brick in a child's honor, ultimately helping to build an orphanage in Haiti. On any brick or plaque, you can simply state your child's name and date of birth or add language such as "In Loving Memory" or "Grows Forever in Our Hearts."

***Burial:*** When Nicole and Steve Long lost their son Evan at 30 weeks, they weren't certain what to do. "At the time, I was devastated and in denial so we did nothing right away," says Nicole. "He was cremated, and after a few months we realized he was still a part of our family and wanted him to always enjoy the fun we all had together." They sprinkled his ashes at the base of a tree near their vacation cabin. "Now whenever we are sledding on the hill or playing in the creek or just having dinner on the deck, we see the tree," says Nicole, "and we remember he is still with us having a great time." Dr. Manzella says that maintaining an "ongoing bond with a child who has died, can be a real source of comfort."

Julia Keevey chose a more traditional burial for her stillborn daughter. "We had her ashes buried in a cemetery near my hometown and had a small service. It was comforting to be able to visit her and see her name on the headstone, something I could touch."

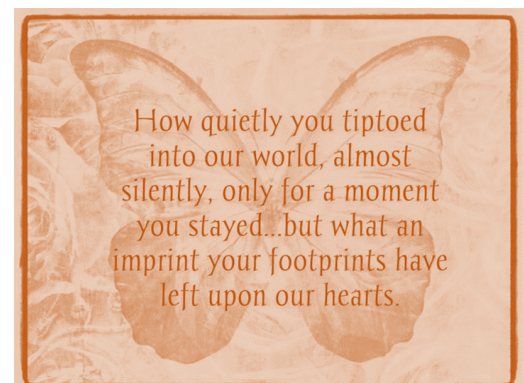
Other families may wish to keep their child's remains closer to home. Nora Nicholson cannot part with her stillborn daughter's ashes and chose not to have a formal ceremony.

***Group ceremonies:*** October is SIDS, Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, and many communities hold events for parents during that month. For example, October 15 is [Pregnancy and Infant Loss Day](#), so there are often opportunities to connect with others in your area who have experienced similar loss.

Nicholson has found these to be a comfort. "We always have our son's name in the program." Parents can also choose to include photos, poems, or essays about their child.

Regardless of how grieving parents acknowledge their loss, finding a concrete or symbolic action that is meaningful to your family can help with the healing process and bring comfort over time.

**Remembering a Child Lost to Stillbirth or Miscarriage — Seleni - Maternal Mental Health Institute**



While some may feel no thanks for grief, we all have a choice at some point to begin paying kindnesses forward in the name of the person who died, in honor of the love we still feel for them. One way to let your loved one continue to touch this physical world is through your commitment to Random Acts of Kindness. Do a kindness for someone today, and you are invoking the name of your loved one into the world.

mothermenna.com

## ♥ 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.

**Janet Neal, in loving memory of her beloved son, Josh Neal.**

### 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 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.

Check out our closed Facebook page, *The Modesto Area of TCF*. Make a request to join the page and 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](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com) or by phone at 209-622-6786 or on Facebook.

#### OUR CHAPTER 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 (209)622-6786 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](mailto: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.

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](mailto:scasity@comcast.net)



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

[www.modestoriverbanktcf.org](http://www.modestoriverbanktcf.org)

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(click on the link above for further information).

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