

# 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)

September 2021

[tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com](mailto:tcfmodestoriverbank@gmail.com)

#### MONTHLY MEETING

7:00 PM

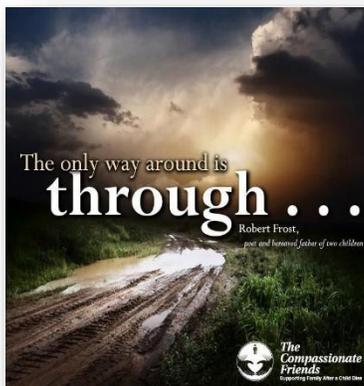
Bridge Covenant Church  
2201 Morrill Road  
Riverbank, CA 95367  
(Corner of Oakdale Rd and Morrill Rd)

Please join us at our  
next meeting on  
**Monday, September 13<sup>th</sup>**

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

#### Upcoming Meetings

October 11<sup>th</sup>  
November 8<sup>th</sup>  
December 13<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

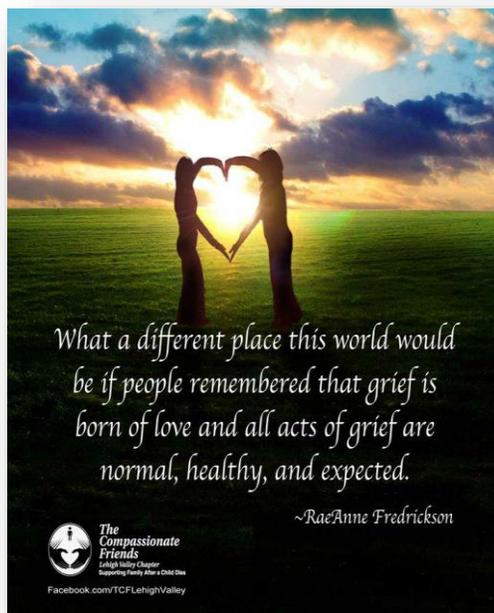
[Chapter Meeting Locator - Compassionate Friends](#)



### 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.



#### 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

# SEPTEMBER

## Dates to Remember

### •◦• MODESTO AREA CHAPTER SOCIAL •◦•

Join our monthly chapter meeting on Monday, September 13th



...while we enjoy some delicious pie & ice cream

•◦•  
...we will end a little early

...to spend some time together  
•◦•

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

Thursday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Please join us for an online meeting.

[September Zoom-Chapter Meeting](#)



### Sunday Conversations

Sunday, September 26<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m.

A chance for us to just chat!!

[September Zoom-Sunday Conversations](#)

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**Friends**  
FOR SURVIVAL

### 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 \(friendsforsurvival.org\)](#)

# Let Me Tell You Who I Am Now



I am still a person like you, with a life like yours, yet not. I am still a mother like you, yet not at all like you, all at the same time. I wish there were some way you could understand me, without becoming who I am now. You see, there's a pain I carry, unlike any pain you carry, unless you are a bereaved mother too.

This pain I take is *always* there. It doesn't nap during the day or get safely tucked into bed at night. It follows me everywhere; it never leaves my side— like my son used to do, only grief is not cuddly, nor sweet. No, a mother's grief is a torturous life sentence that no one wants to live.

It's bargaining for a different ending, over and over, one where no one dies. It's the panic of it happening again, anytime, anywhere... It's the toxic self-blame that never turns its finger around to blame itself. It's the spiraling of obsessive thoughts, (*what if... if only?*) seeping its poison through every crevice of my mind. It's the regret, so convincing that I failed as a mother, powerless to protect my child from death.

Yes, grief's emotions are as unpredictable as the ocean tide, crashing down on me to drown me alive. I have three kids, not two. *My first son died.* There, I said it. I know you may not want to hear it. Neither do I, yet I have to say it over and over and over to slowly wrap my mind around the incomprehensible truth. My son is dead. It might make you uncomfortable for a moment, yet I am uncomfortable for a lifetime.

Either I pretend he never existed, for your comfort, or, to my discomfort, this new life of mine comes with dreaded and sometimes hostile reactions— blank stares, awkward silences, big eyes bugging out of shocked faces; or worse, looks of despair, pity, shame, judgment; even, turning of backs, that walk away, leaving me in mid-sentence of my pain. Or, worst of all, altogether ceasing to be my friend, upon discovering that, I am a bereaved mother.

Please, do not judge me by circumstances beyond my control. Do not think you are more powerful than God that this could never happen to you. Do not imply by your words or your looks that I am a terrible mother because my child died. Do not think I didn't try everything humanly possible to save my son from death. Let me tell you something, if a mother's love were enough to protect her children from all harm then children would never die.

Please remember, I did not choose this version of my life. I am living yet dying, breathing yet suffocating, laughing yet crying. I am a mother like you yet a bereaved mother all at the same time. I am a mother's worst nightmare, only it's not a dream. *It's my life.*

While you complain about your kids spilling milk or painting on the wall, I swallow my grief whole, silently choking on my wish for my problems to be *just like yours*. Paint splattered all over my walls, milk spilled, covering my kitchen floor. I am aching for the signs of my toddler living, breathing, playing, *alive* in my home.

I am longing for the iterations of what could have been.

Instead, I have an empty chair at every meal, the contents of my son's entire life neatly stacked in sharpie-marked boxes in storage that now smells more like mildew and dust than of my son. Instead, my lap seems full, but it is always one-third empty. I'm left with a math equation that *never* equates. No matter how many times I count, my children never add up to three. *One is always missing.*

And a million more could never replace or erase the pain of missing the one who now lives only in the confines of my memory. There is an eternal hole in my heart, in my life, the size and shape of him and only him that no one and nothing will ever be able to fill.

I am a bereaved mother, a grieving quasi-supermom; I straddle time and space. You might feel pulled in two directions, but let me tell you how it feels to be torn between heaven and earth, as a mother to an angel and a mother to two living, breathing, laughing little boys – a mother to the living and the dead. Let me tell you how it feels to have my son deleted; his existence denied because it makes people uncomfortable to hear *he lived* and *he died*.

He is as real to me now as he was in life. He is not some inconvenient truth – he is my *son*. He will *always* be my son, just as I will *always* be his mother because *love never dies*.

Next time you see me in the grocery store, at the playground, or across the street, please remember:

- ♥ I am still a person like you, with a life like yours, yet not.
- ♥ I am still a mother like you, yet not at all like you, all at the same time.
- ♥ I am a bereaved mother, a grieving quasi-supermom; I straddle time and space.
- ♥ I wish there was some way you could understand me, without becoming who I am now.

*Let Me Tell You Who I Am Now / Still Standing Magazine*



## 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.



## ♥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.

**From Lisa Allen, in loving memory of her beloved brother, Charlie Allen**

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.

# 10 SIMPLE ACTS: HOW TO SURVIVE EARLY GRIEF

I can close my eyes and go back there: the indescribable, unfathomable rift in the universe, the bizarre and surreal world after my child disappeared into the river. A wholly irrelevant event catapulted into my life, changing everything.

The first weeks and months after an out-of-order death are a world unto themselves. At that initial time of impact, few things bring comfort. Words of *intended* comfort just grate. Encouragement is not really helpful. That “impact” zone is not the time for future plans or even for reflection on what’s going on. Survival has a very small circumference. It’s not an ordinary time, and ordinary rules do not apply.

Here are some of *my* survival rules from those early days:

1. **Safety first.** If you are driving while crying too hard to see straight, pull over. If you are about to get in the car, help yourself calm down before you start. Distraught driving is dangerous. Let’s be honest here, sometimes you do not care one bit about your own “safety.” I know. What kept my hands on the wheel in those cannot care about me moments was knowing I did not want to create another me. I kept driving, or stopped driving, because I did not want to risk harming someone else. I would not chance creating another bereaved parent. I did not want to mess up someone else’s life, or cause anyone else any pain, by creating an accident scene they had to clean up. So – safety first. Do it for yourself, if you can. Do it for others if you must.

2. **Drink.** Drink water. I have a list I wrote for myself in those very first months called: some survival things. Number two on that list is: *crying for three months has really been dehydrating. Please drink water.* Oh, it was so early then. I can close my eyes and feel it. The same is true now as it was then: Drink. Drink water.

3. **Move.** Number one on that survival list was move. This is the most reliable thing. And by “reliable,” I think I meant the thing that was the most likely to induce even the smallest measure of calm. In whatever ways your body might be able to, move. Movement can help. Not because it solves anything, but because movement itself, as you’re able, can make things different.

4. **Get outside.** Being outside in a non-human world is a relief; the trees will not ask “how are you *really?*” and the wind does not care if you cry. There is a lot to be said about being in places that don’t need anything from you. Getting out into the natural world can be a bit tricky if your loss happened outside in nature; you may need to experiment. For example, I still find the presence of water a necessity, though rushing rivers are no longer a place I can be.

5. **Tend something.** This is also on my early survival list. Clean out the garden. Water the plants. Brush the animals. Bake someone a cake. Send a care package. Why this soothed me, I don’t know. I’m sure it has something to do with thinking of others, or giving love, or getting out of myself for a while. Whatever the reason, tending something seemed to help. It did then, and it still does now.

6. **Read.** My notes from back then say simply: it seems to put you in a better place. If you are a reader by nature, you may find yourself starving for words. I read and discarded more books than I can remember now. The ones that fed me, I devoured. It’s true: the right words will put you in a better place.

7. **Show**er. Really. You will feel just the tiniest bit better. The same goes for sweeping the floor or any other seemingly tedious and irrelevant task of hygiene. Really. You will feel just the tiniest bit better to be clean.

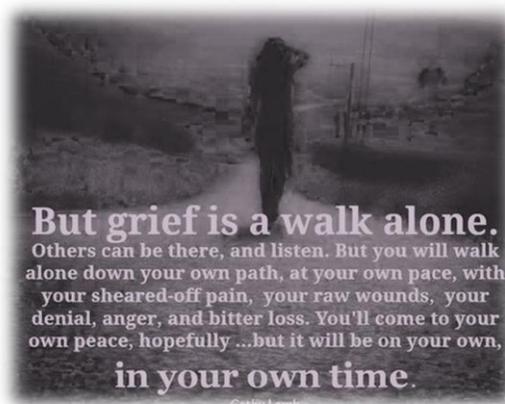
8. **Eat**. This is a tricky one. Some people eat under stress; some people, like me, lose all desire or interest in food. I dropped over 20 pounds within the first few months. I simply did not eat. My “nutrients” came largely from the cream in my tea and the occasional cupcake. Every few-to-several days, I might eat a few bites of something more. I was fortunate – there was no lasting damage to my physical body. I was also under my doctor’s care at this time, and she let me know she would intervene if she felt I was in danger. Your body may respond differently. Some people develop serious, lasting physical challenges due to what we call “the grief diet.” You might find that small doses of healthy, nutrient-dense food are more easily tolerated by your mind and body than full-on meals. Do what you can.

9. **Do not turn your anger on yourself**. Looking back on this list now, I am somewhat amazed at myself for this one. I wrote: *do not turn your anger in on yourself. This is what you are doing when you think you aren’t doing this right, that you’re the one messing up your continued connection, that you should be better at this. Notice you’re angry. Call it that. Name it for what it is, don’t turn it on yourself. The answer to constriction and anger is to name it, not beat on yourself.*

10. **Say no. Say yes**. You cannot afford any big drains to your energy, and you can’t afford to miss too many ways to replenish it. This will mean saying no to people, places, and events that are too much for you. It will mean leaving a place you thought you could be, right in the middle of everything. This also means saying the occasional yes to things that have brought, or could bring, a small amount of light or love into your hour, your day, your week. Try out that new meditation group you read about, explore the group for friends and information. Sit in empty churches in their off hours, or go to a park to be near people and outside in the open air. Meet your old friends for coffee or tea. Be willing to gift yourself some light. Say no to what drains you further, say yes to what might offer even the smallest respite or support.

While these are the highlights from *my* list, the most supportive rules or guidelines for this time will come out of your own experience. You know yourself best. The core parts of you, the ways you care for yourself, the ways you find solace and connection – these have not completely changed, though they may feel irrelevant. It’s true that unexpected death messes with your world in a way few things can. Adding to this list, or creating a whole new one of your own, might give you just the tiniest road-map inside a wholly disoriented time. Remember, one day at a time.

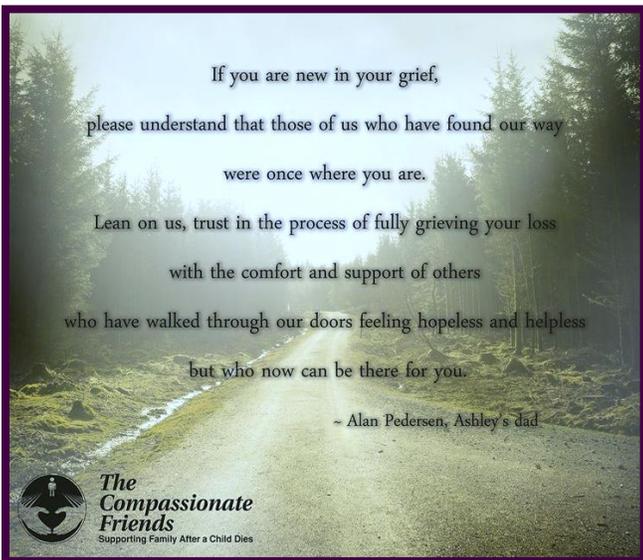
[10 simple acts: how to survive early grief - Refuge In Grief](#)



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.



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

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

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)

Support our chapter by using *Amazon Smile*

[smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)

(click on the link above for further information).

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](http://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.

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**Turn on AmazonSmile**  
Open the app and find 'Settings' in the main menu (≡). Tap on 'AmazonSmile' and follow the on-screen instructions to turn on AmazonSmile on your phone.