



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies



Newsletter

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POSTAGE

PAUL BROOME in memory of CYNTHIA BROOME

ED and CAROLYN BUCHANAN in memory of ASHLEY BUCHANAN

JERRY and CINDY WIGGLESWORTH in memory of LEE WIGGLESWORTH

CHUCK and MARLISE PRESTWOOD in memory of KRISSY PRESTWOOD

The Compassionate Friends THANK YOU for your donations
They are tax deductible and deeply appreciated.

Please be careful when you say "I know just how you feel"

There are a lot of phrases that tick off people grieving, but perhaps none so much as "I know just how you feel". Ask someone grieving to list the most annoying things people said to them in their grief. I promise this will often be near the top of the list. It is often coupled closely with the similar, "oh this reminds me of when (insert their experience here)". You would think people want empathy in grief, yet this common phrase doesn't seem to do it. But why? What is the instinct to say this about? Why does it ruffle feathers?

Understanding empathy

In its most basic definition, 'empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another'. It sounds incredibly easy but anyone who has experienced a loss knows that it suddenly doesn't feel easy. Friends who they expected would be there for them are suddenly gone, or rushing them in their grief, saying to be strong, telling them what, when, and how to grieve. These words often leave people grieving feeling like empathy in grief is an impossibility. It feels like no one understands what you're going through.

Why shortcuts don't work

One of the greatest misunderstandings of empathy is the feeling that we must have a similar experience to someone who is suffering in order to see or understand their pain. We see someone else's pain and we want them to feel seen. We worry they won't believe we can truly see them and their pain if we haven't experienced it. So, rather than the hard work of carefully listening, attending, and supporting them, we try to take a shortcut. In an effort to seek common ground, we search our experiences for something similar. Something we, in a well-intentioned way, believe will allow us to better connect and for them to feel more seen. And that's the misstep.

This is one of those instances when our grief-support instincts are off (and not the only one!). Instead of making someone feel seen and showing them we were present, listening, and trying to support, we show them the opposite. We make obvious that instead of being present and with them, that when they shared their pain we looked at ourselves instead. We often unintentionally minimize their pain by taking something that is different and try to make it the same. Now, this isn't to say we haven't gone through things – we have. We may have experienced very real, similar, painful and difficult things. But in a moment when someone is grieving their own personal loss, one that is theirs and theirs alone, what becomes important is not what we have gone through. It is being able to focus and be present with what they have gone through.

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But wait, my loss is helping me understand them. I swear.

If you're feeling like I'm saying you need to filter sharing your grief experience because it is going to upset someone else grieving, I want to make one thing very clear. This isn't just about you upsetting them by not seeing them.

This is about you and really looking at whether this path to 'understanding' them is the best path.

When we take that shortcut to empathy, quickly moving from their experience to our own, we suddenly put our own story and experience front and center in our minds. Instead of just listening carefully and being present with their experience and feelings, we start to project our experience and feelings onto them. We start to assume our own feelings from our own similar experience must be what that other person is feeling and experiencing too. By remembering how we felt, we actually become less able to hear honestly how they are feeling. Our brains are now busy thinking about the connections to our own story, or about what we are going to say next to tell them about us. Empathy research shows that it is helpful to imagine the feelings of another, but when we dig into our own narrative to connect we actually don't see their experience as clearly.

Our pain impacts how we see their pain (and that isn't always good!)

There is a lot of research that shows that we always have a tendency to see others' pain through the lens of our own pain. There are neurons in our brain that actually contribute to this! What this means is that I use how I feel to make sense of how someone else feels. In a study around physical pain, they gave participants an electric shock. They then watched someone else receive an electric shock. Participants then how rated much they thought the other person suffered.

In part two, they gave some people a pill that reduced their personal perception of pain. Then, you guessed it, another electric shock. Next they watched someone else (who hadn't been given a painkiller) receive an electric shock. Guess what. They rated the other person as experiencing less pain, because they personally experienced less pain. Even though there is no reason for us to assume the other person experienced less pain, because they didn't receive anything that would reduce pain!

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That might not seem that big of a deal, but if we think about it for a moment, it can have a real impact. If we associate their experience with our similar experience, suddenly we gauge their pain based on how intense ours was. Perhaps our pain was never as bad. Or perhaps our pain has started feeling easier to carry, because we have become stronger. Though we remember our pain was bad, we don't *feel* it in the same. Now when we see their pain, we may minimize it a bit because we can't help but impose our own strength, that we have gained with time and work, on them. But they haven't had the opportunity to gain that strength yet.

As the researcher in this study said, "If you reduce people's self-experienced pain, if you induce analgesia [inability to feel pain], that not only helps people to deal with their own pain, but it also reduces empathy for the pain of another person," Lamm said.

But sometimes I really do know how they feel! I went through the same thing!

We're not being unreasonable here. If you have experienced something similar you may relate deeply to another person; you may have more understanding than someone who hasn't been through something similar. In fact, that same empathy research shows that when we have been through something, we are able to better understand it when we see another going through it than if we hadn't. And we know that there is great comfort in meeting someone else who has been through what you have been through. This is one reason peer support groups can be helpful. It can be comforting to meet someone else who has also lost a loved one to overdose or suicide, or someone else who has lost a spouse or a child. But grief is always as unique as the individual person and their relationship with the person they lost, and we can't forget that.

So . . . what should I do?

What is most important is to enter the interaction with the assumption that your similar loss does have value, but it *doesn't* give you automatic understanding. Then focus on listening, being present, reflecting back what you are hearing from them. Do that without comparing it to your loss or looking at it through your own experience.

In the end, it is our ability to say "we have both gone through some things. I have not gone through exactly what you have gone through. I don't know how you feel, but I am here to listen and do my best to understand" that helps. It can make a person feel more seen and heard in their grief. From that place, they know you are thinking of them, not yourself, and you are open to supporting them through their story and experience – whatever it may be.

Thank you Marcia Lefteroff for forwarding this excellent article.

A POEM FOR MY DAUGHTER

I love you now, as I so loved you then
your Spirit is with me forever
When you were born all of heaven sang out
Joyous that we were together

Your eyes twinkled bright as a billion stars
Your lashes brushed sweet angel's kisses
As you snuggled so warmly against my neck
So serenely, you gave me such bliss

As I stroked your head, very gently My Dear
Your hair felt as soft as down feathers
Your fingers, so tiny, wove tightly with mine
Rainbow's end couldn't give me more treasure

I remember you now, I'll remember you when
every day and each night begins
You're a part of my soul, every beat of my heart
I promise, My Darling, Amen

*Karinelyn Paul
Broomfield, CO*

In Memory of my daughter, Katrina



Just Thinking

When getting old, our wrinkles appear
And as our hair turns gray
We sometimes say
"Seems like just yesterday"

Often there's another thought
When remembering life's path so slow
We marvel and might say
"Seems so long ago"

We are always in awe of time
Never mind what the clock may show
Our minds alter time quite curious
"Time goes by so fast" or "Time goes by so slow"

When compared to eternity
A lifetime must be "A blink of an eye"
Making each human life span the same
Thus we are all the same age when we die

Time is what we perceive
Could it really be both fast and slow
Or is time just a blink of the eye
Someday we will surely know

*Donald Moyers
TCF Galveston County, TX*



Filling In Holes

Today, my husband and I went to the plant nursery and bought some flowers and bedding plants to go in our gardens. Spring is here, and the weather is beautiful. Not cold at all... but also not so hot that the thought of puttering in the garden brings a groan of dismay.

I remember my first spring in this house. We were so excited. Our family was nearly complete. Our third son was on his way, and we had just had a house built. We were at the plant nursery at least once a week. Our life was busy, bright, untainted by grief.

I remember our second spring in this house. How winter hung on, tenacious, unyielding, both outside, and in our hearts. I remember the first warm spring day. I came home from work early, determined to make SOMETHING grow in my life. Maybe I couldn't get my son to live, but I was going to make something live.

Grief was a raw, open wound then, and my anger was deep. I was angry at the world, at God...at everything. And so I approached my yard, shovel in hand. I decided I had to have a garden in the middle of my yard. I began furiously digging out the grass, making an oval in the center. It took me hours digging out that oval. But I wasn't through. I then decided I wanted a garden right by my doorway, so I dug out that area too. And then I made big holes and tore out all the roots and stones and other junk.

I made big holes in my yard that day. And in the weeks to come I DID fill them with things. Funny thing, as I dug those holes and pulled on the grass, my anger drained away. My salty tears mixed with the sweat of exertion and the dirt, and ran off my arms undetected to the outside world. Digging those holes provided an outlet for my anger and my hurt.

Today I dug some more holes. But this time, my holes were smaller. And I filled them. With small, delicate flowers, purple and white. I put bulbs in the ground too, filling other small holes. And I reflected back on another hole. The hole in my heart. No, I can't ever fill it with what "should" be there... my son "should" be almost seven now, full of energy, and wanting to plant flowers with Mom. But I have filled that hole with other things. With love and healing and memories. And with the lessons and the gifts my son gave me. I never saw those gifts that spring, as I was digging out holes in my yard. And though I would rather have that hole filled with my son's presence, I am grateful for the gifts he gave. And so I will go on, filling holes.

*Lisa Sculley, March, 1999
TCF Jacksonville, FL*



Like the Butterfly

It fluttered above my head
Weightless in the soft breeze.
I reached up my hand
It lit on my finger.

Waving glistening wings gently,
It looked at me for timeless moments.
I smiled, reaching deep and
Finding all those cherished memories.

As it flitted off through the sunlit morn,
I knew we had said hello once more.

*Leslie Langford
TCF, North Platte, NE*

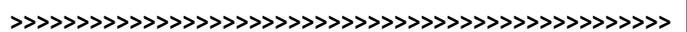


A Day

A laugh a day keeps the heart pumping.
A tear a day keeps the mind clear.
A smile a day gives joy to others.
A hug a day gives the hopeless
hope.

A thought a day brings loved ones near.
A memory a day brings you closer to me.
Laughs, tears, smiles, hugs stitched with thoughts
and memories--
They're all in my days without you.

*Pam Burden
TCF, Augusta, GA*



The Shadows of the Night

I sit alone in the shadows of the night.
Looking up at the stars that shine so bright
I think of you somewhere far up above
I remember all the laughter, happiness, and love.

The full moon shines bright in the sky
Staring at the fall moon, I start to cry
From the face of the moon above the tree
I see your face staring back at me.

Then it starts to rain and the sky turns gray
I remember what happened two years ago in May
It continued to rain the whole night through
I think the rain meant that you were crying too.

*Lisa Johnson
TCF, Baltimore, MD*

OUR CHILDREN—LOVED, MISSED & REMEMBERED

“They may be deceased by a few days or years, but we still miss them so much and still shed our tears.”

Birth Date	Child's name	Parent's name(s)	Cause
07/03	Charles Randolph Weatherly	Ruth Ellen Germany	Homicide
07/07	Jimmy Shamburger	Vicki Shamburger	Suicide
07/08	Cynthia M. Broome	Paul A. Broome	Homicide
07/10	David T. Gentry (Brother)	Dr. Glenn/Betty Gentry	Stroke
07/13	Drew Browning	Carolyn/Larry Browning	Unknown
0713	Keith Searcy	Dale Sims	Fall at Home
0713	Keith Searcy	Brenda Knight	Fall at Home
07/14	Joseph Latham	Sam/Rita Latham	Cancer
07/16	Cheyenne-Elizabeth Greer	Samantha Yowell	Pneumonia
07/17	Sherri Lynn Smith	Odie/Patsy Smith	Thrown from truck
07/22	Brandon Bailey Bennett	James/Anita Bennett	Suicide
07/26	Stephen Todd Watts	Corinne Watts	Motorcycle accident
07/27	Jessica Leigh Ann Windmiller	Robert/Donna Windmiller	Automobile accident
07/29	Jason Douglas Beard	Mary Pierce	
07/29	Justin Thomas Beard	Mary Pierce	
07/30	Nathan Shane Moak	April Moak	Suicide
07/31	Brantley Clark	Jeanette Browder	SIDS

Vacations

Vacation time can be painful for bereaved parents. Caught up with normal demands of making a living or keeping a household going, we have less time to think than we do on vacations, especially the "take it easy" kind-at a hideaway, tucked away somewhere.

In the summers following Tricia's death, I found vacations could bring a special kind of pain. We avoided going to places where we had vacationed with her. At one time, I thought Williamsburg might be off my list forever since we had a very happy time together there. I tried it one summer three years later and found that she walked the cobbled streets with me. Now that nine years have passed and the pain has eased, maybe the happy memories we shared in Williamsburg can heighten the pleasure of another visit there.

For the first few years after Tricia's death, we found fast-paced vacations at places we had never been before, to be the best. The stimulation of new experiences in new places with new people refreshed us and sent us home more ready to pick up our grief work. That is not to say when we did something or saw something that Tricia would have enjoyed, we didn't mention her. We did, but it seemed less painful than at home.

One caution: Do allow enough time for sleep; otherwise, an exhausted body can depress you.

We've said it many times: YOU HAVE TO FIND YOUR OWN WAY, YOUR OWN PEACE. Let vacation time be another try at that; but do give yourself a break in choosing the time and locale where that can best be accomplished. Don't be afraid of change-it can help with your re-evaluation of life.

Elizabeth Estes
TCF Augusta, GA
In Memory of Tricia



OUR CHILDREN—LOVED, MISSED & REMEMBERED

Heaven Date	Child's name	Parent's name(s)	Cause
07/01	Jonathan Lazich	Gary/Cindy Lazich	Drowning
07/02	Gina Hawthorne Sumrall	Ed/Susie Hawthorne	Car accident
07/04	George "Eddie" Chapman, Jr.	George/Emma Chapman	Auto accident
07/06	Mike Fox, Jr.	Mr. Mike Fox, Sr.	Drugs
07/09	Lance Darryl Wroten	Bruce Wroten	Auto accident
07/10	Michael Ward	Melody Vaughn	Cancer
07/11	Albert Alan Ball, Jr.	Pamela K. Williams-Shelton	Suicide
07/13	Zy Keenan Rae	Lee Speed	Motorcycle accident
07/15	Stephen Todd Watts	Corinne Watts	Motorcycle accident
07/15	Herb Rothman	Marie Rothman (sibling)	Heart problem
07/15	Chad Aaron Pigg	Rick/Mary C. Pickens	Accidental gunshot
07/16	Matthew Omerza	Michelle/Eric Omerza	Suicide
07/21	Bryan "Keith" Barr	Deborah Barr Holden	Cardiac arrest
07/23	Dillon Ross Fredrick	Debbie Burkes	Auto accident
07/23	Jason Eubanks	Barbara Eubanks	asthma
07/24	Audie Tyson	Bob/Carolyn Stewart	Suicide
07/26	Michael Medlock	Rosemary Medlock	Cancer
07/27	Tyler Lind	Jennifer Lind	Auto Accident
07/29	Lucius Andrew Tyson, III	Judy S. Tyson	Heart condition
07/30	Colton Wayne Hall	Lisa Dewayne Hall	Hit by train
07/30	Destiny McDonald	Pamela Hall	
07/30	Morgan Aaron Rodgers	Dennis/Darline Rodgers	Accidental shooting
07/31	Angela Nicole Smith	Brenda/Bobby Smith	Auto Accident

REPLY FORM—IMPORTANT

It is important for our children to be remembered. Please understand that in order for your child to be on the "special days" list, you must fill out this form, which gives us permission to list this information.

I/We are bereaved Parents grandparents siblings step-parents friends relatives professional
 Please add remove keep me on the mailing list.
 Remember my Child Sibling Grandchild on Special Days. Please have someone call me.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____

Zip _____

E-mail address _____

Name of Child _____

Age when deceased _____

Cause* _____

Child's Birthday _____ Child's Heaven Date _____

*You need not list cause of death. We ask this only so that parents whose children have died in similar ways may reach one another.

Optional: Your donations are tax deductible and allow us to reach to other bereaved parents.
 Enclosed is \$ _____ given in memory of _____

I would like my contribution used to fund: Check one: Postage Children's Memorial Love Gift
 Mail to: The Compassionate Friends; P.O. Box 1396; Jackson, Mississippi; 39215-1396