

# 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)

January 2023

[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, January 9<sup>th</sup>

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

#### Upcoming Meetings

February 13<sup>th</sup>

March 13<sup>th</sup>

April 10<sup>th</sup>



### Our Mission

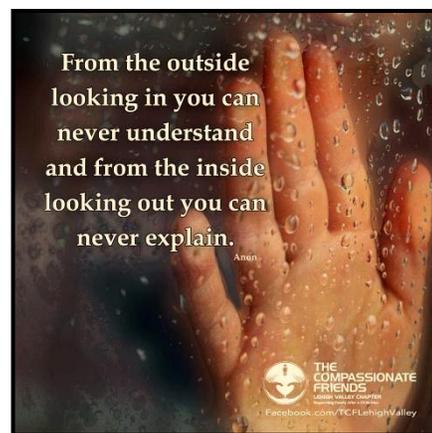
*The mission of  
The Compassionate Friends:*

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

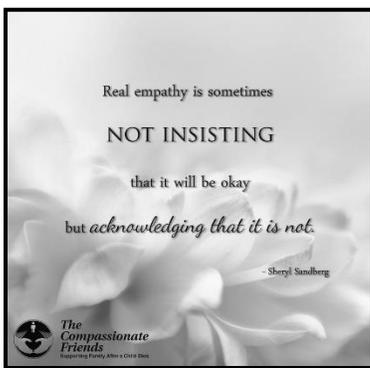
Please leave a message and  
a steering committee  
member will return your  
call.



From the outside  
looking in you can  
never understand  
and from the inside  
looking out you can  
never explain.

Amn

THE COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS  
LEIGH VALLEY CHAPTER  
www.tcf.org  
Facebook.com/TCFL LeighValley



Real empathy is sometimes

NOT INSISTING

that it will be okay

but acknowledging that it is not.

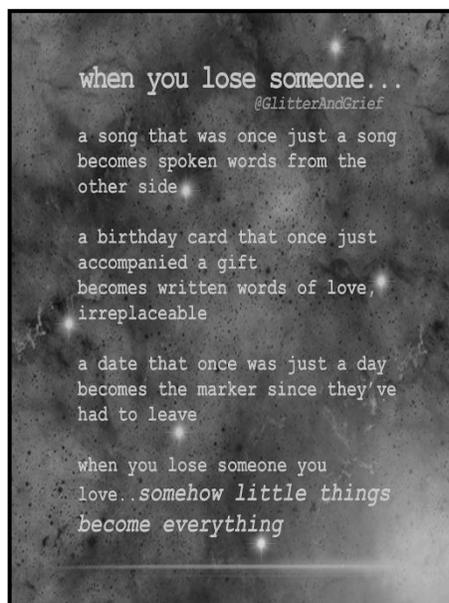
- Sheryl Sandberg



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



when you lose someone...

@GlitterAndGrief

a song that was once just a song  
becomes spoken words from the  
other side

a birthday card that once just  
accompanied a gift  
becomes written words of love,  
irreplaceable

a date that once was just a day  
becomes the marker since they've  
had to leave

when you lose someone you  
love... somehow little things  
become everything

#### 2023 Steering Committee

**Susan Casity**  
Chapter Co-Leader

**Kris Leitner**  
Chapter Co-Leader

**Devon Homme**  
Secretary

**Elsie Freeman**  
Treasurer

**Janet Neal**  
Outreach Coordinator

**Vacant Position**  
Hospitality & Library

**Chad Homme**  
Public Relations

**Kris Leitner**  
Newsletter Editor

**Mike & Suzanne Casity**  
Website

Dear Friends ~

*Another year has come and gone without our loved ones.  
Our beloved child or grandchild or sibling, so dearly missed.*

*Another holiday spent without them.*

*Another empty chair.*

*Another heartbreak to withstand.*

*But you know what?*

**WE SURVIVED!**

*Somehow the beautiful memories sustained our hearts to keep beating, our lungs to take another breath, and our love to endure.*

**WE DID IT!**

*Together we supported, lifted, and comforted one another. Just knowing that there exists others who know what we are going through helps us to persevere this unimaginable journey.*

**WE ARE STRONGER TOGETHER!**

*As the New Year begins, let us remember that together we are stronger. Together we are better. Together we will never walk this path alone.*





## **New Year's Resolutions for the Bereaved**

By Tanya Lord

This year I resolve to:

- ♥ Not put a time limit on my grief. Loving someone means loving them for my life time whether they are physically present or not.
- ♥ Tell their stories, the happy and the sad, they will live on through me.
- ♥ Encourage others to share memories.
- ♥ Teach others that they cannot "make" me cry, tears are only an external expression of how I am feeling all the time.
- ♥ Understand that crying or otherwise expressing my pain is healthy and normal. "Doing well" means expressing my feelings.
- ♥ Understand that others will not understand my pain and it isn't fair to expect them to do anything but listen.
- ♥ Recognize that asking for help from those that love us is a really a gift that we give to them.
- ♥ Help others, reaching out to others in pain will help me to heal.
- ♥ Do something nice for myself every day.
- ♥ Know that if today I can not do everything that needs to be done, tomorrow is another chance to get it done.
- ♥ Cry when I need to, laugh when I can and to not feel guilty about either one.
- ♥ Let go, bit by bit, of the guilt, regret and anger because I know holding on to these emotions can be so damaging.
- ♥ Take a risk and let others into my life and heart.
- ♥ Take care of my physical, emotional and spiritual health.
- ♥ Reinvest in life a little bit each day...



# Grief In The New Year: 5 Mindful Tips To Cope



Grief in the New Year is never easy. I have been writing about New Year's Grief for a decade now, and know that on New Year's Eve the *MindfulnessAndGrief.com* website is busier than any other night of the year. I share this because I want you to know that you are not alone.

Whether your loved one died in 2020, or decades ago, New Year's when you are grieving does not pass by without you thinking of, and yearning for, the person you love and lost. It is normal to feel strong emotions. It is normal to not know what to do.

So let's take a collective breath in, and out, to honor all of our fellow humans who are missing someone right now. This includes yourself.

The New Year is a marker in time. As we transition from 2020 into 2021, some of you may be feeling ambivalent. Part of you may be digging in your heels, while another part can't wait for this awful year to end. However you are feeling, please own it. Acknowledge the spectrum of feelings without judgement or shame.

As with other holidays, anniversaries, and days that end in feeling sad, angry, anxious, resistant, confused, detached, or any other difficult emotion is par for the course when you are grieving. Instead of fighting the reality that things are different, let go a little, and allow yourself to do things a little differently from before. Here are a few ideas for you to cope with grief in the New Year.

## **5 Tips to Cope With Grief In The New Year**

### **1. Focus on self-compassion and self-care instead of self-improvement.**

If you are grieving in the New Year, you may want to skip the typical New Year's resolutions and instead, focus on self-care for your grieving mind, body, and spirit. Simple things like getting good sleep, eating nourishing food, and exercising a little bit each day will help your body and mind support you during loss, but do these things with an attitude of self-care instead of self-improvement, which is often implied in our resolutions. Don't add to your suffering by trying to attain an unrealistic goal. Instead, treat yourself as you would treat a beloved friend in the same position.

### **2. Create your own mantra to replace "Happy New Year."**

If you are like most grieving people, the idea of being happy is a bridge too far from where you are right now, but since you are going to hear these words, again and again, you may as well incorporate them into your self-care practice. Instead of feeling bad for not feeling happy, or angry that someone would assume you could feel happy, use these three ubiquitous words as a reminder to send yourself compassion.

*Try this: Each time you see or hear “Happy New Year,” offer yourself words of kindness that resonate with you. For example, “May I treat myself with kindness this year,” or “May I have a Compassionate New Year,” or simply “This is hard and I am doing my best.” This not only puts you back in the driver’s seat so you have a modicum of control over your experience but is a great bell of awareness that can remind you to take care of yourself.*

### **3. Know that you are not leaving your loved one behind.**

When you cross the threshold of a new year without your special person by your side, it can feel like you are leaving them behind. That isn’t the case. Yes, the annual change of the calendar is a marker that time is passing, but you will never forget your special person, no matter how many years go by.

Take some time out early this year to reflect on the ways you carry your special person with you. What habits, likes, dislikes, hobbies, or mannerisms do you share with them? What are your favorite memories of your time together? If they are a blood relative, in what ways do you look like them? They have left their mark on your heart, and that will never go away.

### **4. Prioritize your grief-work with your new calendar.**

Instead of just scheduling things you *have* to do, use your new calendar to plan what you *need* to do to support yourself this year. While none of us have a crystal ball, many people find holidays and anniversaries especially challenging. Record them on your calendar, and plan how you want to spend those special days (I have a worksheet in [Awaken](#) that will help you plan ahead).

Whether scheduling coffee with a supportive friend on your loved one’s birthday or gathering a group of survivors together to reminisce on the anniversary of their death, knowing what you are going to do on these special grief-days may help reduce your anxiety.

You can also plan ahead to attend [grief support groups](#) and memorial events through your local hospice or grief group, many of which are online during the pandemic. Even if the groups don’t start for a while, get them on your calendar now, before work and social obligations take over. You can also block off self-care time for self-massage, yoga, meditation, [journaling](#), or just free time to do as you wish.

### **5. Steady your mind in the present with meditation.**

The human brain is rarely fully present, and this is especially true when we are grieving. Part of us wants to fast forward and leave this awful time behind, but an even bigger part wants to turn around and sprint back to the time when our loved one was still alive.

The reality, of course, is that we can’t control the passing of time, but we can control what we do with our attention. In the meditation world, we call this bouncing around “monkey mind”. Although it is just a side-effect of being human, ruminating rarely reduces our suffering.

There are countless ways you can learn to tame your mind with [meditation](#), but I find that in the early days, months and even years of grief, [focusing meditation](#) practices can be especially helpful.

Try this: with your eyes open or closed, turn your attention toward your breath. As you breathe in, silently say to yourself – *In*. As you breathe out, silently say to yourself – *Out*.

Do this over and over each time you breathe, for 3-5 minutes. When your monkey mind wanders off, find your breath again and start over. It doesn’t matter how often you need to begin again. After a few minutes, you may feel calmer and more in control of your own mind.

\*Note – the underlined text in the article will take you to links within the [mindfulnessandgrief.com](http://mindfulnessandgrief.com) website.

By: Heather Stang, MA, C-IAYT

[Grief In The New Year: 5 Mindful Tips To Cope With Loss \(mindfulnessandgrief.com\)](http://mindfulnessandgrief.com)



# 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?



## ♥ 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 Paul Irizarry, beloved son of Kathleen & Balvino Irizarry*

### 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)

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.

How to turn on AmazonSmile in the mobile app

- 1**  
**Join AmazonSmile**  
If you are not already an AmazonSmile member, [sign up](#) on your web browser. Simply select your favorite charity to start generating donations, at no cost to you.
- 2**  
**Get the app**  
Download or update to the latest version of the Amazon Shopping app on your phone. You can find it in the [App Store](#) for iOS or [Google Play](#) for Android.
- 3**  
**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.