

# The Compassionate Friends

## The Modesto Area Chapter of The Compassionate Friends

### Supporting Families 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 2022

[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 12<sup>th</sup>**

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

#### Upcoming Meetings

Oct 10<sup>th</sup>  
Nov 14<sup>th</sup>  
Dec 12<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

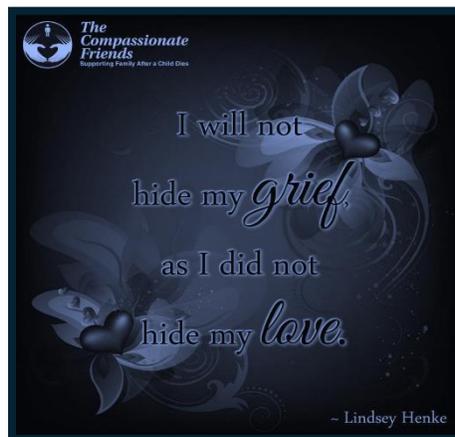
[Chapter Meeting Locator - Compassionate Friends](#)



#### 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.



#### 2022 Steering Committee

**Tracey Parker**  
Chapter 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

## Tips From a First-Time Conference Attendee

I have been a bereaved parent for eight and a half years now. I have been part of The Compassionate Friends for almost as long. James died in February of 2014 and I joined our chapter in May of that year. Since then, I have volunteered in several positions including Chapter Leader, Facebook Moderator, and most recently, Regional Coordinator. Even though I am very involved in many aspects of TCF, this year was the first year I attended an in-person National Conference!!

I thought I was prepared. I thought I knew what to expect. I thought I would breeze my way through, eat some standard hotel food and maybe meet a few people. I was unprepared. It wasn't what I had expected. There were random hugs from strangers, absolutely delicious food with wonderful dinner companions, new friendships that will last a lifetime and so much more!! The weekend was filled with music, keynote speakers who spoke from the heart, workshops galore, sharing sessions of every variety, and so many activities; some of which you might not expect at a conference for grieving people. I was overwhelmed. In both good and not-so-good ways. So, I would like to share with you a few things I have learned and what I will do differently at next year's conference in Denver.

**Arrive Early and Stay Late:** If possible give yourself a day or so leeway heading into the conference. I found it helpful to be there a day early so I was unpacked and rested. Registration began on Thursday and there is a meet and greet on Thursday evening that I highly recommend. Especially, if you aren't very familiar with some of the different aspects of TCF. I left Sunday afternoon after the conference was officially over. I wish I had stayed at least one more night. To me, staying another night is more important than arriving early. So if you have to choose I would say, leave Monday. A little downtime would have really helped in processing all that I had experienced that weekend.

**Get the App:** Yes, there's an app for that!! I was able to create a schedule based on what I wanted to attend. It was so helpful to know what I had coming up and when I had some free time. It even provided the locations of each event. It also had info on the keynote speakers, the conference sponsors, a listing of other attendees, and sections for some of the extra activities like the Healing Haven and Crafty Corner.

**Don't Expect Assigned Seating:** The national organization has several events, including the opening program, a Friday luncheon, a Saturday night dinner with a candle lighting ceremony, the walk to remember as well as a closing ceremony. All of these came with music, keynote speakers, and fellowship with other bereaved parents, siblings, and grandparents. I had the opportunity to learn more about TCF as an organization, learn new stories and perspectives from keynote speakers, make new friends, and most important of all, remember their loved ones and James with them! One of the things I thought was so wonderful is that there is no assigned seating. It really gives you a chance to sit with friends you know or to pull up a chair to meet a whole new group of folks depending on your comfort level!

**Bring Photos:** National provides a space for memory boards. It's an area with bulletin boards set up where attendees can post a photo of their loved ones. It was a beautiful and touching memorial to all of those who have gone too soon!

**Leave Space:** The conference has so much to offer that it can be a little overwhelming and a lot taxing to try and fit in all you may want to do. I never made it to the Crafty Corner or to the Open to Hope booth. I was constantly on the go and I was exhausted. I suggest you give yourself the gift of some quiet time. You can do this up in your hotel room or even in the Reflection Room that they provide for attendees. Whatever form your self-care takes I recommend you find a way to be able to take a few deep breaths to collect your thoughts and process your emotions.

**Take Notes:** While taking notes during a workshop or keynote speaker might be obvious what I found to be less obvious is wanting to remember something in the "in-between times". Like wanting to take down the name of someone I met in the lobby or remember a quote the person I sat with at lunch shared. Next year I am going to have a dedicated space on my phone for taking notes. A handy little notebook might work too!

**Bring Tissues, You Will Cry:** This was an experience like nothing else. It is hard to concisely write down in a way that others who have not experienced it can understand. A lot like our grief. As I said, it has been almost eight and a half years since I joined The Compassionate Friends and I can honestly say that attending the National Conference has been a life-altering experience for me. I encourage all of you to try and attend a conference at least once.

**By: Tracey Parker ~ James' Mom/Chapter Leader**

# Help September



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

*Thursday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00 p.m.*

*Please join us for an online meeting*

*Modesto Area TCF Chapter 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 \(friendsforsurvival.org\)](https://meetings.friendsforsurvival.org)*

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## *Fall Luncheon*

*Saturday, November 5<sup>th</sup> 2022*

*Please mark your calendars!!*

*More information & details to  
follow in the October Newsletter!!!*

*Save  
The  
Date*

# *Let the Light In*



Bleak. Exhausting. Raw. There will be plenty of days like this. You know the ones. The days when no matter how hard you try, you cannot manage to see past the pain, when the weight of it all feels far beyond what you can bear. The days when the future seems nothing short of daunting, when it seems you will always be surrounded by darkness. The days when everything feels like a trigger, when tears are ever-present and threaten to spill over at the slightest provocation.

Yes, there will be plenty of days like this. But on occasion, you may notice something more – a glimpse of light, of hope, perhaps even joy.

When these moments arise, please do your aching heart a favor. Grant yourself permission to feel something beyond the pain and despair. Quiet the guilty voices in your mind, and embrace these moments, no matter how fleeting they may be.

No one can survive within grief's deepest trenches forever. It is necessary to come up for air, to rise to the surface and find life again. I assure you, doing so does not mean that you have moved on, nor that you have forgotten your child. No, certainly not.

It means, rather, that you are finding courage in a world that feels so very different from anything you have ever known. It means that you are choosing to live, an opportunity never afforded to your child. And in doing so, you are honoring this precious child of yours.

In the time that has passed since my daughter's death, I have found that her presence feels most palpable when I open my eyes and my heart to the wonder that remains in her wake. I think of these moments, when life somehow feels beautiful despite her gaping absence, as gifts from my sweet girl. I encourage you to do the same.

When you feel a lightness taking hold, imagine that your child is speaking to you. This is your child urging you to lean into life, to soak up every ounce of it. This is your child reminding you that you are worthy, that you deserve to feel the sun's warmth upon your face, to feel your heart soar. This is your child telling you to hold on, that there is indeed beauty left for you in this life.

Go ahead. Let the light in. Your heart deserves it.

# *Why The Death Of A Sibling Is Like Losing A Part Of Yourself*



If you're anything like me, you grew up in a fairytale surrounded by siblings who stood 10 feet tall. You grew up with parents who were as brave as superheroes. You grew up naive to the world around you.

Don't get me wrong; I was well aware of what the news never failed to talk about. I knew mothers and fathers could lose their battles with cancer. I knew children could be kidnapped. I knew houses burned down, and car accidents happened almost every day. But, I had created a world where my family was untouchable, where nothing could ever happen to them because they were mine.

Five years ago, a police officer knocked on our front door. It was 10 pm, and I had just gotten ready for bed. "There's been an accident. You need to come to the hospital right away." By this point, I had seen enough TV shows to know this was not what you wanted to hear from a police officer, especially not at 10 pm, and especially not when your older brother still hadn't made it home. I lost a brother that day. I lost a cheerleader, a mentor and a best friend. The safe space I had created so easily disappeared, and I was left to tackle the world without the one person who had always paved a path before me.

There's no word to describe the loss of a sibling. If you lose a spouse, you're a widow or widower. If you lose your parents, you're an orphan. But if you lose a sibling, you just become the girl who lost her brother.

My therapist described it as losing a limb. If someone tells you it gets better with time, the person's lying to you. Yes, cuts get better and wounds do heal, but when you lose an arm, it's foolish to await the day it "gets better." You simply learn to live with one arm.

I learned to do the things I know he would have liked. I learned to listen to the songs we sang together in the car without breaking down in tears. I learned — and am still learning — to function normally without him just a phone call away.

However, "normal" has lately been like a blanket too short for a bed. Sometimes it covers you just fine, and other times it leaves you shaking in the cold. I've come to find the worst part is I never know which one it's going to be when I wake up.

It's been almost five years since that day. Some days the ache is a little less than before, but other days it makes me want to lock myself in my room. And some days, I still feel like I am stuck in a void.

There is no statute of limitations on grief. There is no time limit to waking up crying, or having to leave the grocery store because you see your sibling's old friends. There is no special cure for those dull aches in your heart that don't seem to ever go away.

But, coming from a sister who thought she would never find the light again, know there will come a day when the thought of that loved one brings a smile to your face instead of leaving you gasping for a breath you cannot find.

There will come a day when you find yourself talking about your sibling and you do not feel uncomfortable. There will come a day when the universe sends you a sign to let you know your sibling is doing OK.

And there will come a day when the 19 years you were able to have with your sibling becomes enough for the 19 more you'll never have. There is no other love like the love *for* a brother, and no other love like the love *from* a brother. And if you're lucky to have a brother who was also your best friend, that love is going to cover you during the best of times and hold your hand through the worst.

# 9 Self-Care Tips For Grief: Reduce Your Suffering in Mind, Body & Spirit



Self-care during grief can help you suffer less in mind, body, and spirit. Just doing one of these self-care practices can start the ball rolling, so don't feel like you need to do all nine at once. The list is in no particular order, so scan through and pick one or two that feels "doable." In a few days, try one more. Don't worry if you backslide from time to time, just do your best!

## 1. *Be Kind To Yourself*

Grief is painful, and though it may seem far-fetched, there is one person capable of offering you comfort 24 hours a day and seven days a week. That person is you. While self-compassion is not a cultural norm, it should be. Self-compassion has tremendous healing power, and it even makes us nicer to be around for others. Treat yourself as you would treat a beloved friend—in word, thought, and deed. Give yourself space to feel the pain of grief, and also give yourself permission to take a break when you need it.

## 2. *Get A Check-Up*

When you are grieving, your risk for illness increases due to stress. And while grief is a natural reaction to loss, and not an illness itself, this is a good time to check in with a healthcare professional. This check-up will give you the opportunity to attend to any pre-existing health conditions that the stress of grief could negatively impact.

## 3. *Get The Right Amount Of Sleep*

If you are experiencing grief-related insomnia, follow these tips for good sleep hygiene for grief. If you are sleeping more than you did before your loss, know that this, too, is normal, and it may be exactly what you need. If too much sleep is impacting you negatively, in addition to practicing good sleep hygiene, increase your exposure to sunlight, particularly upon waking.

## 4. *Eat Healthy, Drink Water*

What is your stress food? Mine is Triscuits and butter with a side of ice cream. I get it. When your world falls apart, it is natural to turn toward salty, fatty, and sweet foods. Grief feels like fear, and fear loves fuel. Instead of forcing yourself to be a food angel, and trust me I am not, eat some broccoli, a banana, or whatever healthy food your body loves in addition to your comfort food. Let go of the shaming, and do your best to get some nutrients into your system. Drink plenty of water, as it will help your physical and mental state. And do your best to avoid alcohol, as it can disrupt your sleep schedule and depress your mood.

## 5. *Breathe Mindfully*

Breathing fully and with intention accomplishes two things. First, it turns off the stress response known as fight-flight-freeze. Second, it focuses your mind on the present moment, which can stimulate your mental well-being. Take several one to five minute breaks throughout the day. Close your eyes and take three long breaths—focus on creating a nice, long exhale. Spend the next few minutes focusing on your natural breath.

## 6. *Move Your Body*

The right kind of physical movement will help your body release the tension and pain that comes with grief. Whether you take a leisurely stroll outside, practice yoga for grief, or go back to the gym, exercise will contribute to better sleep, mental stability, and an overall sense of well-being. Bonus points if you breathe and drink water while you exercise!

### 7. Connect With Others

One of the most important things you can do for your physical and mental well-being is to connect with other human beings (and animals!) who care about you. Sometimes when we are grieving we feel like our support system has fallen apart, so consider joining a peer support group or schedule an appointment with a compassionate grief counselor or therapist who is comfortable talking about grief. Go for a walk with a trusted friend, or schedule lunch with a family member with whom you can share mutual support.

### 8. Express & Create

You do not need to be a professional writer or artist to benefit from creative expression. Putting your thoughts and feelings into words and pictures can help you make sense of seemingly senseless feelings. Write daily in your grief journal, or make a collage to express your grief with magazines and glue sticks. Crafting activities, such as knitting and drawing in adult coloring books, can help you focus and activate the creative side of your brain, which can increase your resilience and contribute to a better sense of well-being.

### 9. Meditate

There are many forms of meditation to help with grief. This includes contemplative prayer, mindfulness and mantra-based meditations, focus and breath practices, guided visualization, walking meditation, and yoga (meditation in motion). Meditation helps you take control of your mind and stay in the present, which contributes to your mental well-being. Practice regularly. The frequency with which you practice is more important than the length of your individual sessions. Start with two to five minutes a day. If you can, work up to 10 to 20 minutes a day.

[9 Self-Care Tips For Grief: Reduce Your Suffering in Mind, Body & Spirit \(mindfulnessandgrief.com\)](http://mindfulnessandgrief.com)

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## ♥ 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 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 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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