

When a Brother or Sister Dies...

it becomes a family affair. The death of a child within the family circle affects all with equal despair. No one acts as they should—nothing is normal. Maybe Mom cries most of the time and cannot get out of bed. Perhaps Dad holds everything in and says very little but his eyes are red from the shedding of tears that we have rarely ever seen. Our siblings can't understand why death has entered their home and are frightened by the unknown. Sometimes...we no longer have a sibling and have become an "only child". If there are other surviving siblings, the family hierarchy will have changed—middle siblings may find themselves now the oldest or the youngest in the family.

Tragedy brings a seriousness to life and we often think about:

- the true meaning of life
- the unimportance of events that were so crucial the day before
- our own mortality/funeral
- our changed role in the family
- how other families are spared
- our terrible sadness
- the uncertainty of the future

We may experience:

- changes in our sleep
- anxiety, tiredness, or restlessness
- changes in relationships with family and friends
- feelings of anger toward ourselves, others, God, or sometimes even toward the sibling who died
- a variety of moods, including swings between very good and very, very sad
- attention deficits
- feelings of rejection from parents who are distracted, irritable, or inattentive
- guilt about what we did or did not do for our sibling, for enjoying ourselves, and even for just surviving.

Sibling Credo

We are the SURVIVING SIBLINGS
of The Compassionate Friends.
We are brought together by the
deaths of our brothers and sisters.

Open your hearts to us,
but have patience with us.
Sometimes we will need
the support of our friends.

At other times we need
our families to be there.
Sometimes we must walk alone,
taking our memories with us,
continuing to become the
individuals we want to be.

We cannot be our dead
brother or sister.
However, a special part
of them lives on with us.

When our brothers and sisters died,
our lives changed.

We are living a life very different
from what we envisioned
and we feel the responsibility
to be strong even when we feel weak.

Yet we can go on
because we understand better
than many others the value of family
and the precious gift of life.

Our goal is not to be the forgotten
mourners that we sometimes are,
but to walk together to face our
tomorrows as

SURVIVING SIBLINGS
of The Compassionate Friends.

Questions and Answers for Bereaved Siblings

"Why do I suddenly burst into tears and why am I not able to control my crying?"

Crying is a normal and natural reaction to grief. Tears often flow when you least expect them.

"Why am I so mad at my sister for dying? She left me all alone. I know it wasn't her fault. I feel so guilty for being angry."

At some time, everyone is angry at the person who died just as when they were alive. Anger does not mean that you loved them less. It means the loss is so great that you want the terrible pain to end. It will never go away entirely, but it will lessen.

"I can't remember exactly how she looks. Does this mean I am forgetting her?"

No, even if your sister were alive you wouldn't be able to recall everything about her. It is natural to forget some details, but many gestures and memories will be in your heart forever.

"I can't concentrate. I can't think and I can't remember a thing. Am I losing my mind?"

You have not lost your mind, although it may feel that way. Your mind is probably just overloaded. Not only do you have to continue to go through your daily routine, but your mind is flooded with thoughts and feelings for your brother or sister. This is temporary. Your memory and concentration will return.

"I feel so guilty for the way I yelled at my brother. We would fight about the silliest things. I'll never be able to tell him how sorry I am."

Brothers and sisters in every family quarrel and don't apologize after every argument. Even though you fought, you still loved your brother and he loved you.

"I have terrible nightmares; sometimes I dream I'm dying. I can't tell anyone--they'll think I'm crazy. Am I?"

Some grieving people experience these intense dreams. Such dreams, though frightening, serve a healthy purpose. You will have fewer frightening dreams as time goes on.

"It's been over a year now and sometimes I find that I no longer want to be with people. Their conversations are so trivial and shallow. Can you believe my friend thought the end of the world had come when her boyfriend dumped her? The real disaster is my brother is dead! Why am I so intolerant?"

Many bereaved siblings find that the second year of grief is sometimes harder than the first. Because you feel less numb, you are more vulnerable to feelings of sadness and helplessness. You have begun to confront painful feelings and memories you worked hard to avoid during the first year after the death. And others seem to have forgotten your grief.

"Suddenly my parents expect me to parent them. I just can't handle it."

This is truly one of the most unfair positions your grief puts you in. Try to share these feelings with your parents. Hopefully, you will be better able to understand one another.

"I'm not always sad, or I feel like I didn't grieve 'correctly' when my brother died. Am I bad person?"

We all handle grief differently. Sometimes we don't cry or feel sad initially. This is probably the effect of shock. This is how you are starting your grief journey, and that is ok.

"What if my other siblings are not grieving the same way I am?"

Each child will have had a different relationship to the dead sibling and also have a different personality themselves. Ways of expressing or avoiding expressing grief will differ. Try to tolerate and understand each other.

Authored by bereaved siblings

When I See You

When I see your picture
It makes me want to cry,
Just because I never had
The chance to say goodbye.

When I hear a tape
That your voice is on,
It makes it very hard
Just to carry on.

When I wonder why
You left us on that day,
The only thing that comes to mind
Is something
I must say:
"I love you",
"I miss you".

Dean S. Channing, TCF Canada
in memory of his sister Kimberly Susanne

For Support in Your Area Contact:



Sibling Grief: When a Brother or Sister Dies



THE COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS OF CANADA

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An international peer support
organization for bereaved parents and
their surviving children