



The Compassionate Friends of Canada

When A Child Dies...

National Newsletter – Spring 2024

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Transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.

Reverend Simon Stephens, Founder, TCF.

Welcome to the Spring edition of the national newsletter! Our objective continues to be to provide news, information, and items of interest to connect members from coast to coast, and to provide guidance to leaders in organizing events and activities. If you have any material that you would like to contribute, or suggestions for topics that you would like to see included, please e-mail the National Office.

Which Season Are You In?

Some years ago, we attended a presentation titled “The Seasons of Grief”, illustrated by evocative photographs of wildlife and nature. Beginning with Fall, as realization of the loss takes hold and life seems to retreat into itself, through the coldest, darkest days of Winter, to the re-emergence of hope in Spring and eventually, acceptance of the loss and moving forward into Summer.

Although we know that the schedule for grief does not follow a fixed calendar and lasts longer than one year, the imagery of the seasons can provide some comfort and help us understand our progress.

No matter which season of grief you find yourself in, we hope that this Spring brings you a renewed sense of hope for the future.

Website Updates: One of our challenges as a volunteer-run organization is to make it easier for those looking for support to find us. Recent changes to the TCF Canada website are intended to raise our on-line profile and to make information more easily accessible.

SEO Improvements: To improve our “findability” through on-line searches, our webmaster has added key words to several website pages. We are expecting to see an increase in site visits as search engines such as Google and Bing register the new information.

Chapter Locator Map: In addition to showing the location of chapters across the country, the map now includes contact phone numbers and e-mail addresses so that parents can make contact more easily. The chapter listing by province is still provided under a separate tab.

Video Resources: Along with our downloadable grief information leaflets, we have added links to some TCF-produced videos on different aspects of grieving that parents may find helpful. There is also a description of the benefits of TCF peer support meetings that may encourage parents to attend in person.

Chapter Annual Report: One of the few requirements for a TCF chapter to remain in good standing is to submit an Annual Report of your activities. The information allows us to keep our records up-to-date and to ensure that contact details on the national website are correct, which is important for referring parents who are looking for support. To make the reporting process easier, we have developed an on-line version using Google Forms.

Early in March, chapter leaders will receive an e-mail with a link to the on-line form. We will also include a pdf version that you can print, fill out, scan, and return by e-mail or snail mail. Please complete and return either version as soon as possible. Thank you in advance for your support.

Donations: We are grateful for donations of any amount either directly to our Treasurer or through the *Canada Helps* link on our website. This month, we send a big “thank you” to TCF Avalon, NL for their contribution.

Annual General Meeting: The TCF Canada 2024 AGM will be held on **Saturday, June 1st** starting at **12:00 noon** Eastern time. While this annual meeting is a requirement of the Canada Revenue Agency to maintain our charitable status, it is also an opportunity to review some of the activities that keep our organization running. A quorum requires a minimum of five chapters to be represented, so please contact the National Office to register your attendance.

Chapter Chats: Our chat sessions provide an opportunity for leaders across the country to connect, share ideas, ask questions, and discuss issues in an informal setting. Seven leaders from BC, MB, QC and NL joined in on January 20th and the next Chat is scheduled for **Saturday, April 20th**. To register, please e-mail the National Office.

Facilitator Training: The recent session on January 13th brought together 8 participants from BC, AB and NB. The next session will be held on **Saturday, April 13th** and is open to both new and experienced facilitators to learn and to contribute. To register, please e-mail the National Office.

Outreach Initiative: Our Outreach Committee has continued to contact provincial and municipal agencies and not-for-profit groups across the country to ensure that, as far as possible, grieving parents are aware of The Compassionate Friends and how to contact us. However, the wide diversity of social service listings and support systems, ranging from a 211 service to a static page listing, presents a significant challenge.

We encourage you to check whether the agencies in your area publish a list of support groups and ensure that your chapter is included. This could be a suitable activity for a member who has reached a point in their grief journey where they feel ready to give back by helping others.

The Board is aware of and grateful for the time and effort that each of you put into your chapters to be available and support other grieving parents while you yourself are also grieving.

When the Rawness Returns: *Barb Noseworthy of TCF Burin Peninsula, NL has contributed the following personal description of the emotional ups and downs of the grief journey but reminds us to hold on to hope.*

There was a time that hearing of a tragic accident, or someone’s loss of a child would pain my heart, give me a few minutes of heartache for the loss and maybe I’d say a prayer for the families. On I’d go with my day, my life. Then came my “before” and “after” life. My life before my daughter died and my life after Johanna died.

Rarely do I entertain myself by listening to news reports but it’s inevitable that something will draw my attention to it sometimes. The gut-wrenching report of a fatal MVA brings me to a full stop. My chest is instantly ripped

out. I guess my heart doesn't stop but it feels like it. My breath is a struggle to catch. I'm transported back in time to the day my life as I knew it was gone. The rawness returns.

Suddenly I feel the pain of families whose lives like mine will never be the same. My own grief is as fresh as the day Johanna died. I cry, I sob. Not only for my own loss but also the anguish I know so many others will experience for their lifetime. It feels different now in my "after" life.

It always takes me a few days to find my way back to my place in my journey. I allow myself to revisit my raw grief for that time. It's okay not to be okay some days. We afford that because we've earned it being a bereaved parent. Somewhere we find courage and hope and we go on. Often, we find it through others, family, or friends. For me, it was also having the support of other parents who knew the journey of child loss.

Whether your rawness returns from a harsh reminder of your own tragedy - the birthday, anniversary of their passing, or a special occasion - remember that it's okay to surrender to it and be kind to yourself through it. Grieving the loss of your child is a long journey to navigate. Have Patience and Compassion for yourself along the way, always HOPE.

Closing Thought: This poem by Joe Lawley, a UK co-founder of The Compassionate Friends, is a warm reminder of why we do what we do and how peer support has benefits for both the giver and the receiver.

The Gift

I have a gift.
I did not want this gift, it meant suffering and pain.
The pain came because of love.
A love which had manifested itself in a child.
The child brought its love to me and asked for my love.
Sometimes I did not understand this.
Sometimes I did not appreciate it.
Sometimes I was too busy to listen quietly to this love.
But the love persisted; it was always there.

One day the child died.
But the love remained.
This time the love came in other forms.
This time there were memories; there was sadness and anguish.
And unbelievable pain.

One day a stranger came and stood with me.
The stranger listened and occasionally spoke.
The stranger said "I understand," and did.
You see the stranger had also been this way.
We talked and cried together.
The stranger touched me to comfort.
The stranger became my friend as no other had.
My friend said "I am always here," and was.

One day I lifted my head.
I noticed another grieving, grey and drawn with pain.
I approached and spoke.
I touched and comforted.
I said, "I will walk with you," and did.

I also had the gift.

by Joe Lawley - UK

The author of this poem, is the co-founder parent of The Compassionate Friends.

Mark Your Calendar: A final reminder to contact the National Office to register for these upcoming events.

April 13th – Facilitator training

April 20th – Chapter Chat

June 1st – Annual General Meeting