



The Compassionate Friends of Canada

When A Child Dies...

National Newsletter – Winter 2024

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Transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope.

Reverend Simon Stephens, Founder, TCF.

Welcome to the Winter 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.

Backwards and Forwards

The month of January is named for the mythological Roman god Janus, whose two faces symbolise transitions, entrances and exits, and beginnings and endings. He is often seen to be looking back on the old year and forward to the new.

This issue of the newsletter follows a similar theme: looking back in remembrance of our children through the World-wide Candle Lighting, and looking forward, perhaps with some trepidation, to the upcoming holiday season and the challenges and uncertainties of another new year. Karen Destun shares some personal thoughts on these transitions.

The opening title is an apt description of our grief journeys. May your memories of the past be the wings to carry you forward.

World-wide Candle Lighting



By the time this newsletter arrives in your in-box, the 2024 event will be just a few days away, on **Sunday December 8th**. We know that many chapters are planning their own gathering, some for the first time. Please consider posting the event in local media and on-line to reach out to those parents who may not be aware of TCF.

If your chapter is planning an on-line program, please consider posting the contact information on the *Parents* and/or *TCF Leadership* Facebook groups. Many individuals unaware of the event, or unable to attend in person, will appreciate being able to join with others in commemorating their child(ren).

A big “thank you” to all those who are organizing a celebration of the lives of our children gone too soon.

AFTN Presentation

Earlier this year, the Alberta First Nations Telehealth Network invited TCF Canada to make a presentation to their members on coping with the death of a child. Over the summer, a team of Board members compiled a series of 25 slides outlining TCF's peer support approach and suggesting how an individual can help those grieving a loss. The presentation, titled "*How To Help When A Child Dies*", took place on November 12th over the AFTN Zoom network and lasted about an hour, including audience questions. Although the on-line audience was small, the host was very grateful for our participation. The session was recorded and has been posted on the AFTN website for a wider audience.

The Board is making this presentation available to any chapter that wishes to inform their community about The Compassionate Friends organization. Please contact the National Office to receive a copy that can be tailored for your chapter and audience.

Ideas for the Holiday Season

Self-care and well-being. These terms are used often these days, especially in conjunction with so much in our busy lives. When it comes to grief and the holidays, it can be difficult to slow down amid the expectations of others and be sure that we're treating ourselves well.

Taking time to reflect on what we ourselves need to feel well during the holidays can be a challenge. Finding a balance between what family and friends need and what you need may be at odds. The idea of celebrating at all can be such a struggle since our child has died. Each one of us has a different grief journey and path. Being able to understand your own level of participation will be a good place to start. Letting friends and family know what your level of grief and participation is, can be helpful when it comes to their expectations. Grief can often be a surprise guest that accompanies you wherever you go. Providing an RSVP at the last minute can be an important act of self-care.

Holidays connect us to so many memories, and those memories can be attached to simply bringing out the decorations. Our memories can be so attached to holiday traditions. If you need to, make changes to your traditions. If you need to, change the date. You can move the festivities to a different day if that makes it more manageable. Others might feel better if they hold to routines and traditions. You may wish to hold on to your items that belong to your child and display them each year. If this feels awkward, your feelings about it may change over time. Going through the motions can be OK, and not being able to, can be OK as well. For families with younger children, it can be very hard to keep up the magic and traditions. Facing and dealing with emotions can be hard but good. We may shelve our emotions so that we get through the holidays for younger children. What an incredibly hard balance to strike. Getting together with the whole extended family can make our pain more than when we're alone. We feel the absence of our child more, when there are more of our family members around us. Saying no to large group gatherings, and setting your own boundaries is a huge part of self-care. Bottom line, find what works best for you. KD

Chapter Annual Reports

In addition to following the *Seven Principles of The Compassionate Friends* and complying with the *Sharing Circle Guidelines*, chapter leaders are required to inform the national office of any changes to their contact details or leadership team. Up-to-date information ensures that parents seeking support either by phone, email, or through the website can find it quickly and efficiently. The principal means of providing this information is the Chapter Annual Report, which is distributed in January each year to be completed and returned by the end of March. This allows us to update our records for the Annual General Meeting in June.

To simplify the process for 2025, we have developed a fillable pdf version that can be completed and returned by e-mail. Please watch your in-box for the report form in the new year.

Chapter Resources

In a recent survey, several chapters expressed a need for outreach material, such as brochures and posters, to raise their profile in their local community. The Board has reviewed some potential layouts for a standardized, but customizable format. If your chapter has a brochure or poster that may be suitable, please forward a sample to the national office.

We are also planning to make a TCF Canada video that could be used for informational and promotional purposes. If you have any experience or expertise in this field, we would very much like to hear from you.

Donations: This issue, we give a big “Thank You” for donations from TCF Montreal and from individuals in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

Pins and Books: Copies of the TCF Canada book of poems *Reflections from the Heart* and a supply of TCF Canada pins are still available. To receive either or both, please contact the National Office with your mailing address.

Bringing them into the New Year with you

The Celebration of starting a new year, can often bring overwhelming and unexpected feelings of loss. I remember the first year after our Lauren passed away, New Year’s Eve was surprisingly difficult for me. I hadn’t expected the feelings that bubbled to the surface and threatened to crash through. I was grateful that we were with close friends, and very far away from home. We had decided to spend the Winter Holiday in England, flying out on Christmas Eve. It felt too painful to be at home, trying to pull together a semblance of Happy Holidays. As bereaved parents, we all know that the ‘first ____ since’ of everything that first year can be excruciatingly hard.

On December 31, 2018, I was looking out over the valley of the Trent River. At night with all the lights from the town glinting in the darkness, it was a magical sight. Fireworks were starting to splash through the night sky. I realized, I couldn’t bring myself to watch the clock tick us into a new year. A new year without Lauren. How was it that I was moving into a new year without my girl? I felt as though I was leaving Lauren behind. Thankfully our friends were understanding and gracious. I went to bed and slept through midnight.

The next year, New Year’s Eve wasn’t as acutely painful. I was anticipating the feeling of moving forward without Lauren again. I needed to find a way to bring her with me. In our closed Facebook group, I chose to post a photo of her, as an act of bringing her into the New Year with me. Other parents followed suit, and it has become a New Year’s tradition.

If you too have felt the pang of the new year, perhaps you have found a way to bring your beloved children with you as we mark the beginning of another calendar year.

KD

And finally...

On behalf of the Board members, we wish you a peaceful holiday season and wings of hope for the new year.

